

NANCY DREW®

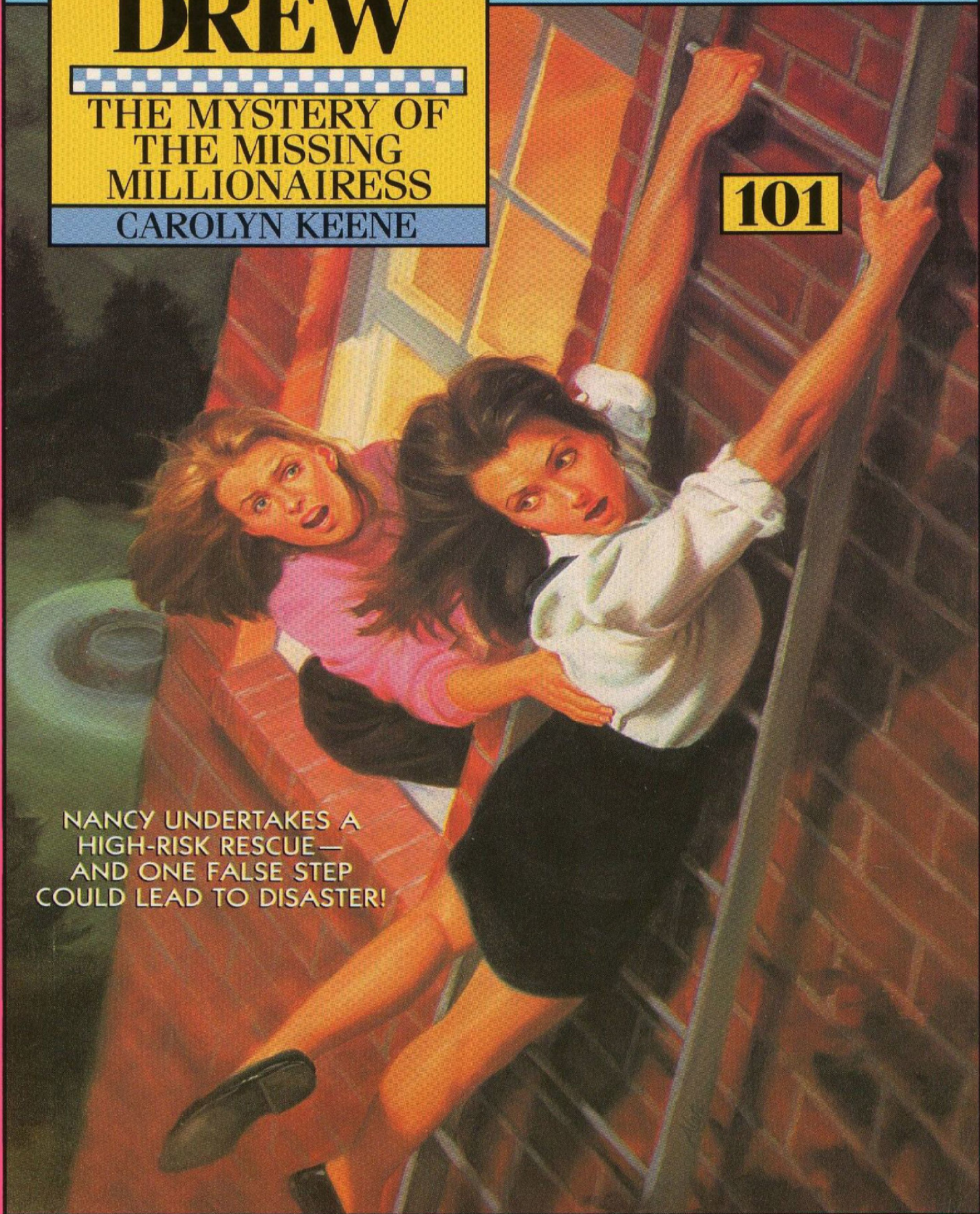
ALL-NEW! FIRST TIME PUBLISHED

THE MYSTERY OF THE MISSING MILLIONAIRESS

CAROLYN KEENE

101

NANCY UNDERTAKES A
HIGH-RISK RESCUE—
AND ONE FALSE STEP
COULD LEAD TO DISASTER!



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1

A Perfect Setting

"I can't believe this is actually a school," Bess Marvin said. "You didn't tell us it would look like this, Nancy. It's like a country estate or something."

"It is beautiful," Nancy agreed.

Nancy Drew, Bess, and Bess's cousin George Fayne were walking across the Brookfield Academy campus. Brookfield was a boarding school for girls near River Heights, the town where the three friends lived. It was a large campus with wide lawns as green as a golf course. The shrubs and flower beds were perfectly trimmed and clipped. Large trees shaded the stone paths that led to the buildings used for classes, offices, and dorms. In the distance the girls could see sleek, high-spirited horses being put through their paces in an equestrian class.

"And to think this place is only thirty miles away from home," Bess said with a sigh. "It's like another world."

Pushing back her reddish-blond hair, eighteen-year-old Nancy smiled. "Don't let its look fool you, Bess," she said. "From what I've heard, Brookfield's a pretty tough school. If you don't keep your grades up, you're out."

"Even if your father happens to be a famous TV star or your mother's an important diplomat?" Bess asked.

"Even then," Nancy answered with a laugh. "Anyway, not every girl who goes here is from a famous or rich family. Claudia Dixon's here on a full scholarship."

Claudia Dixon was the student Nancy had come to visit. She'd never met her, but Claudia's parents were friends of Nancy's father, Carson Drew. Claudia was a junior, but this was her first year at Brookfield. Since the Dixons lived in another

state, Mr. Drew had offered to visit Claudia. Unfortunately, he had been called away on a legal case at the last minute, so Nancy had volunteered to go instead. Bess and George had eagerly agreed to accompany her, since neither of them had ever been on the Brookfield campus. Claudia had been away over the weekend, but her Monday class schedule was light, so the girls had agreed to come midmorning.

Bess stopped and looked up at one of the larger buildings. Made of pale reddish stone, with a red tiled roof, it had two wings that encircled a large pool filled with clear blue water.

"If that's a dormitory," Bess said, "I wouldn't mind going back to school just to live there. Imagine having a swimming pool right in the courtyard. Not that I'd want to swim laps or anything," she added quickly.

"Sorry, Bess, but it's not a dorm," George told her, consulting a small map of the campus. "It's the administration building. The dormitory's farther along this path."

"Besides," Nancy teased, "if you went back to school, you'd have to take math and gym all over again."

"Anyway, it's not a swimming pool," George went on. "According to the map, it's a reflecting pool. The real pool is near the gym." George pointed to a large building beyond the horses, then looked at the map again. "Hey, this says it's an Olympic-sized pool. *And* they have six indoor tennis courts."

"Trust George to notice all the athletic stuff," Bess said, grinning at her cousin. Though they were related, the two of them were very different. Tall and slender with short dark hair, George was good at almost every sport she'd ever tried. Bess's hair was long and blond, and she was forever worrying about her figure. Her favorite "sport" was shopping.

The three friends had started walking on when a girl who looked about sixteen suddenly came running down the path in their direction. Dressed in jeans and a forest-green Brookfield blazer, she rushed past the girls without seeing them. Her dark eyes were wide and frightened.

"Late for class, I bet," George commented.

"Maybe," Nancy said, looking after the girl. "Except she's going into the administration building. She looked really upset," she added thoughtfully. Nancy was well-known in River Heights as a detective, and she always noticed things that no one else seemed to see.

"Come on, Nancy," Bess said, tugging lightly on Nancy's arm. "You're here to visit Claudia, not solve a mystery."

Nancy laughed. "You're right," she agreed, checking her watch. "And I wouldn't have time to get into a mystery, anyway. Claudia has a class at eleven, so I said we'd be at her dorm at ten. It's five to ten already."

George ran a hand through her short dark hair and studied the little map again. "According to this, the dorm's down this path and to the right. We should make it in plenty of time."

Nancy nodded. "Oh, by the way, Bess," she said as they walked on, "when I called Claudia last week, she told me her roommate is Veronica Armand. I thought you might be interested."

"Armand?" Bess's mouth dropped open, and she stopped walking. "As in Nicholas Armand, the actor?"

"And director," Nancy added with a grin. "And multimillionaire. I thought his name would ring a bell."

"It sure does!" Bess exclaimed. "I've seen *Passing Strangers* three times. It's one of my favorite movies. Nicholas Armand is so handsome. I can't wait for his next picture. He's filming it in England right now, I think."

"Trust Bess to know everything about the guy," George teased.

"It wouldn't be hard to find out about Nicholas Armand," Nancy said. "There's always some article or photograph of him in the magazines."

"Come on, Bess." George tugged on her cousin's arm. "We can't stand here all day. You can dream about Nicholas Armand while we walk."

"Just think," Bess said with a sigh as they rounded a curve in the path, "I'm going to meet the daughter of Nicholas Armand."

"If she's around," George reminded her. "She might be in class, you know."

"Sure, but we're spending most of the day at Brookfield," Bess said. "Veronica will have to turn up sometime. I hope she doesn't mind if I ask about her father."

"She's probably used to it," Nancy said with a shrug. "At least, I hope so. I wouldn't mind asking a few questions, either."

"Don't tell me you're a Nicholas Armand fan, too," George said.

"Who isn't?" Nancy said.

"Well, I am, too," George said. "But I'm not a fanatic, like Bess."

"I'm not a fanatic," Bess said huffily. "Anyway, didn't I see you with a video of *Passing Strangers* just last week? How many times have you seen that movie?"

"Twice," George admitted, grinning.

"I guess we're all Armand fans," Nancy said. "But we're here to see Claudia Dixon, not Nicholas Armand's daughter, remember?"

By now they had reached the dormitories. There were three dorms, grouped around another reflecting pool. Like the administration building, they were made of warm, reddish-colored stone, with huge trees all around them.

Inside Claudia's dorm, just off a wide main hall, was a lounge furnished with study tables and soft, comfortable chairs. Across from the lounge were the students' mailboxes and a reception desk.

"Hi," Nancy said to the girl behind the desk. "Would you please ring room three-fifteen and tell Claudia Dixon that Nancy Drew is here?"

"Sure." Putting down the book she'd been reading, the girl tucked her long brown hair behind one ear and reached for the phone. She punched the number, then waited. After a moment she hung up.

"Sorry," she said. "There's no answer."

Nancy pulled a piece of paper from her denim skirt pocket and checked it. "Well, I've got the room number right," she said. "Three-fifteen. Would you mind trying it again?" she asked.

"Okay." The girl picked up her desk phone again. She waited a few moments, then hung up. "Sorry. Still no answer."

"Hmm." Nancy thought for a moment. "You didn't happen to see Claudia earlier, did you?" she asked. "She's expecting us, but maybe we got the time mixed up."

The girl shook her head. "Sorry. I didn't see her, but that doesn't mean she hasn't been by." She tapped her book. "I've got a killer chemistry exam tomorrow, and I've hardly taken my nose out of this book all morning. I don't know Claudia's class schedule," she added, "but you could try the administration building."

"Thanks. I guess we will," Nancy said. "If you see her after we've gone, tell her not to come after us. We'll check back here."

The campus had been busy with students earlier, but now, with ten o'clock classes starting, it was almost empty.

"I'm sure it's just a mix-up," Nancy said as she, Bess, and George headed for the administration building. "Maybe Claudia said she had a ten o'clock class and she'd meet us at eleven. We probably should have stayed at the dorm."

"The administration building isn't far," George said. "We might as well check Claudia's schedule, just to see if you two got your times crossed. Then we can go back to the dorm and wait."

The administration building was cool and quiet inside, with cream-colored walls and floor. Dark oak doors led to various offices. The three girls walked down a wide hallway, checking for the records office.

Just as they were passing the office of the school's director, they heard a girl's voice shout, "No!"

Nancy and her friends paused, exchanging glances.

"Somebody's mad," George remarked quietly.

"You're just imagining things," the voice said loudly from behind the closed door.

Another girl said something, but her voice was too low for Nancy to hear the words.

“Let’s keep going,” Bess urged.

“Oh, come on!” the first voice said angrily. “If you think I’m going to interrupt a phone call because of some crazy stunt Veronica decided to pull, you’re out of your mind.”

“Veronica?” Bess said. “I wonder if they’re talking about Veronica Armand.”

Nancy had started to walk on, but she stopped again. Now she could hear the second girl’s voice clearly.

“It’s not a crazy stunt!” the second voice insisted frantically. “Not this time. And if you won’t let me in, I’ll just barge in myself. She’s *gone*. Don’t you understand what I’m saying? Veronica’s disappeared, and I’m afraid something terrible has happened to her!”

No Cause for Alarm

Nancy frowned. "This sounds really serious," she said, pushing open the door to the office.

Inside, the dark-haired girl Nancy had seen earlier running on the path was standing in front of a desk in the outer office of the school's director. Sitting behind the desk was another student, also wearing the Brookfield blazer. She had short, curly light-brown hair and an annoyed look in her blue eyes.

As Nancy and her friends entered, the girl behind the desk gave them a quick glance. "I'll be with you in a minute," she said curtly. Turning back to the other girl, she said, "Listen, Miss Grey's in the middle of an important call. I can't interrupt her just because you think—"

"I don't just *think*, Margot," the dark-haired girl insisted, leaning her hands on the desk. "I *know* something's wrong."

Margot sighed and drummed her fingers on the desk. "Look, Claudia—"

"Claudia?" Nancy interrupted, surprised. "Excuse me, but are you Claudia Dixon?"

The dark-haired girl turned to look at her. "Yes, I am," she said. "Who are—" She stopped suddenly. "Oh, you must be Nancy Drew."

"Right. And these are my friends, Bess and George," Nancy said with a smile.

Claudia pushed back her tangled hair, looking worried and apologetic. "I'm really sorry I wasn't at the dorm before," she said. "I just couldn't stay there a second longer."

"Don't worry about that," Nancy told her quickly. "It sounds like something's wrong. Is there anything I can do?"

Looking at Nancy, Margot said, "Maybe you can convince her that I shouldn't interrupt Miss Grey. She's the director of this school. I can't just —"

"Margot!" Claudia turned on her angrily. "You're not Miss Grey's bodyguard. You're just a student who works in her office. She's always said if we had problems we could come to see her. So as soon as she gets off the phone, will you please tell her that I have to talk to her?"

Before Margot could answer, the door to the inner office opened. An attractive woman in her forties stepped out. She had short, dark-blond hair and a slender figure. Nancy noticed that her brown eyes looked tired and worried.

"I'm afraid I had to cut my conversation short," she said quietly to Margot and Claudia. "Would you girls mind telling me what all the yelling is about?"

"I'm sorry, Miss Grey," Margot said quickly, "but Claudia —"

"I'll tell her myself," Claudia said. "Miss Grey, I didn't mean to yell, but something's happened. I have to talk to you." She took a deep breath and started to say more, but Miss Grey held up her hand.

"All right, Claudia," she said wearily. "Why don't you come into my office? You can tell me what's happened, and Margot can type the letters I gave her. Then there won't be any need for more shouting."

Miss Grey walked back into her office. Claudia started to follow her, then turned to Nancy. "Would you come, too?" she asked. "Please? Maybe you *can* help."

"Sure," Nancy agreed. "As long as Miss Grey doesn't mind."

"Why should she?" Margot muttered, turning on her computer. "The more the merrier."

Margot wasn't exactly the friendliest person in the world, Nancy thought.

"I'm sure Miss Grey won't mind," Claudia said to Nancy. "Really, I'd like you to hear this."

Nancy nodded and turned to Bess and George. "I'll be out in a little while," she said. "You don't mind waiting, do you?"

"Of course not," Bess answered.

"We'll be out by the pool," George said, with a quick glance at Margot. "It's a little chilly in here."

Hiding a smile, Nancy followed Claudia into Miss Grey's beige-carpeted office, where Claudia introduced her to the Brookfield director.

"Nancy's father and my parents are friends," Claudia explained. "And my parents wanted somebody to visit me to see if I'm lonely or anything. I'm not," she added. "I mean, I miss them, but I love it here."

Already seated behind her desk, Miss Grey smiled and gestured at two chairs covered in bright blue striped cotton.

After Claudia and Nancy had sat down, Miss Grey said, "Now, Claudia. Tell me what's wrong."

"It's Veronica," Claudia said. "She's gone."

"Veronica Armand?" Nancy asked. "Your roommate?"

Claudia nodded.

With a frown Miss Grey asked, "What do you mean, 'gone'?"

"Well, I was away for the weekend, and when I got back last night, Veronica wasn't in our dorm room," Claudia said anxiously. "I didn't think much of it, because she could have been visiting somebody in another room, or at the library. But she usually leaves a note telling me where she is."

"What time did you get back?" Nancy asked.

"About nine. And I was really tired," Claudia said. "I'd gone home with a friend for the weekend, and her whole family is into sports. Every minute we were playing one game or another."

"So you went right to bed," Nancy said.

Claudia nodded. "I was like a zombie. I think I collapsed in my bed about nine-thirty." She closed her eyes for a moment and swallowed hard. "Anyway, when I got up this morning, Veronica still wasn't there," she said, opening her eyes. "And her bed hadn't been slept in at all. She's just *gone*!"

Miss Grey cleared her throat. "Claudia, I know you're worried. But isn't it possible that, if Veronica went to study in

someone else's room, she might have slept there and then gone on to class this morning?"

"I asked around," Claudia said. "That was the first thing I did, because we were supposed to have breakfast together. But nobody has seen her since yesterday afternoon."

"Even if she'd slept in another room and forgotten about eating breakfast with you, she probably would have come back to your room to wash up and change, anyway," Nancy said. "Claudia, has Veronica ever sneaked off campus or anything like that?"

"That's a very good question," Miss Grey said. "And the answer is yes."

"But it was just that one time," Claudia protested. She turned to Nancy. "See, we're not allowed to leave the campus without a pass," she explained. "And we can't leave at all after ten at night, unless it's an emergency or a whole group's going somewhere. Well, a few months ago Veronica made a bet that she could sneak past the security guards at night."

"And she won the bet," Miss Grey said disapprovingly.

"I know, but she only went a little way off campus," Claudia said. "And she came right back. It was just a joke." She turned back to Nancy. "One of the guards caught Veronica sneaking back to the dorm and reported her. And after Miss Grey confined her to campus for two weeks, Veronica told me she'd never pull anything like that again."

"I should hope not," Miss Grey said. "Brookfield is responsible for its students' safety. We take it very seriously."

Claudia jumped up. "Then I think you should call the police and tell them Veronica's missing!" she cried.

"Wait, Claudia," Nancy said. "First, do *you* have any idea where she might be?"

"I've tried to think," Claudia said. "But I just come up blank."

"I don't think we need to bring in the police yet," Miss Grey replied. "But I'm certainly going to inform campus security."

"I think Miss Grey may be right," Nancy said. "Veronica will probably show up soon with a simple explanation for being gone."

"I'm sure there *will* be a simple explanation," Miss Grey said, smiling at Nancy.

"But if there isn't, or if Veronica doesn't show up by the end of the day, then we'll contact the police," Nancy added.

"You seem to have a good mind for this kind of thing, Miss Drew," the director said.

"She should," Claudia said. "After all, she's a famous detective."

Miss Grey raised her eyebrows.

"Her father told my parents all about her detective work," Claudia went on. "She's solved about a zillion cases."

"Hardly that many," Nancy said with a laugh.

Miss Grey looked at Nancy with interest, but she didn't say anything.

Suddenly Claudia gasped. "I just had a great idea! What if Nancy stays and helps us try to find out where Veronica is? I mean, she's really good at this stuff, Miss Grey. She'd probably do better than campus security. She could even pretend to be a student."

"That's not a bad idea," Nancy said slowly. "I could go undercover as a student. If something *has* happened, even if it just turns out to be another joke, whoever knows about it might tell another student before they'd tell security."

"You mean you'll investigate?" Claudia asked hopefully.

Nancy wasn't sure there was a case to investigate, but Claudia seemed so worried that Nancy wanted to do something to help her. "I'd be glad to," Nancy said. "I'm not on another case right now. But it's really up to Miss Grey."

"I'm not yet convinced anything's wrong," Miss Grey said. "But isn't it lucky we've got a detective on hand?"

Nancy smiled, but she couldn't help noticing that the director was nervously fingering the gold chain around her neck.

“By all means, stay and find out all you can, Nancy,” Miss Grey said. “I’ll make a room available for you and get you an ID card and a pass, just in case you have to leave the campus.”

“Thanks,” Nancy said. “Let’s see, I’ll need some kind of story, too. How about if I tell people I just transferred here from River Heights High?”

“Fine.” Miss Grey was still twisting her necklace. “And I’d better put a call through to Veronica’s father in England,” she added. “He was very insistent about being kept informed of Veronica’s welfare.”

That must be why Miss Grey’s so nervous, Nancy thought. She’s got to tell Nicholas Armand that his daughter can’t be found.

“Is Mr. Armand very protective?” Nancy asked.

“As protective as a father can be from a distance,” Miss Grey replied with a shrug. “Veronica’s mother died when Veronica was just a baby.”

“So did mine,” Nancy said. “I guess Veronica and I have something in common.”

Miss Grey looked sympathetically at Nancy. “Mr. Armand is determined that Veronica not be spoiled by his fame or wealth,” she went on. “He’s protective, and he’s also quite strict. When Veronica sneaked off before, I was going to restrict her to campus for a week. It was his idea to make it two.”

It sounded as if Mr. Armand was doing everything to make sure Veronica didn’t get any special treatment, Nancy thought. She wondered how he’d react to the latest news. Would he think this disappearance was another prank, too?

“Well, I’m positive she hasn’t sneaked off this time,” Claudia declared. “Something’s going on, and I just know Nancy will find out what it is.”

• • •

A few minutes later Nancy and Claudia left Miss Grey’s office. The director had assigned Nancy a room and given her a key

and a campus ID that would get her into the dorm without any questions.

Nancy noticed that Margot wasn't at her desk in the outer office. She probably had to go to a class, Nancy thought. She decided to find Margot as soon as she could to ask her why she was so sure that Veronica's disappearance was just a stunt. Maybe Margot knew something that Claudia didn't.

"I'm so glad you're staying, Nancy," Claudia said as the two of them walked out of the administration building. "I just wish I didn't have a class soon. I could help you question some kids around campus."

"That's okay," Nancy told her. "I'd like to check out your room before I start asking questions, anyway."

"Oh, right, to see if there are any clues. Go ahead, the door's not locked," Claudia said. "I usually lock it, but I was so upset when I left this morning that I forgot. I didn't notice anything strange in there, but I'm not a detective." With a worried smile, Claudia hurried off to her class.

Nancy walked over to Bess and George, who were standing by the reflecting pool.

"So what's up?" George asked.

"I'm not sure yet," Nancy said. Quickly she explained what had happened.

"Do you think Veronica's really missing?" Bess asked when Nancy had finished.

"Well, she's missing," Nancy replied. "But there may be an explanation for it. I should have a better idea by tonight, after I've talked to some of the students. Veronica may show up by then, anyway. Listen, I need a favor."

"You don't even have to ask," George said. "We'll drive back to River Heights, tell Hannah what's going on, and bring you back some clothes."

Nancy smiled gratefully. Hannah Gruen had been the Drews' housekeeper ever since Nancy could remember. Hannah was like a member of the family, and Nancy didn't want her to be worried. "Let's see," she said. "I guess some jeans and a few

shirts will be enough. Underwear and socks, and maybe a sweat suit. Oh, and my tape deck and some cassettes. If I'm going to be a student, I've got to have music, right?"

"How about a care package?" Bess suggested. "That'd be even more realistic."

"Definitely," Nancy agreed. "Hannah made a big batch of her chocolate chip cookies yesterday, so bring me a bunch, okay? And don't eat them all on the way back here," she teased.

After saying goodbye to Bess and George, Nancy headed back to Claudia's dormitory. A different girl was at the reception desk, and she waved Nancy on after seeing her ID.

Glad that her room was near Claudia and Veronica's, Nancy rode the elevator up to the third floor. She passed her room, which was numbered 310, but didn't go inside. Instead she walked down an orange carpeted hallway, turned a corner, and stopped in front of room 315.

Nancy was reaching for the knob when she heard a noise from inside the room. There was a shuffle, then a sharp bang, as if a drawer had been slammed shut.

It can't be Claudia, Nancy thought. She's in class. Could Veronica have come back from wherever she'd been? If she had, then this would be the shortest case Nancy had ever worked on.

Nancy turned the knob and pushed open the door. Inside the room, rummaging through a drawer in one of the desks, was Margot, the curly-haired girl from Miss Grey's office.

Without a Trace

When Margot saw Nancy, she gasped and jumped away from the desk. “What are *you* doing here?” Margot demanded. She sounded angry, but there was a nervous look in her blue eyes.

Nancy closed the door behind her and leaned against it. “I could ask you the same question,” she said.

Margot glanced quickly at the desk, then back at Nancy. “I loaned Veronica some notes from English class,” she said. “She never gave them back, and I need them.”

Nancy thought Margot was lying, but she didn’t want to challenge her. Margot might know something about where Veronica had gone, and Nancy was hoping the girl would share her information. It wouldn’t be a good idea to make Margot even angrier by accusing her of lying. She might never cooperate then.

Smiling, Nancy said, “I guess those notes are pretty important, right?”

“They sure are,” Margot agreed. “And it’s just like Veronica not to return them.”

“What do you mean?”

“Oh, she’s so spoiled,” Margot said with a shrug. “I guess it’s not completely her fault. If my father were rich and famous, I would probably get used to having everything money can buy. You know how rich people are—they just take everything for granted.”

“But you and Veronica are friends, right?” Nancy asked. “I mean, you borrowed her notes.”

“She happens to be smart,” Margot said. “We’re not enemies, but we’re not friends, either.”

Nancy nodded. "So if she had plans to go somewhere, she probably wouldn't tell you."

"No way," Margot said.

"But it's not like Veronica to leave without telling someone, is it?" Nancy asked, looking around the room. "She seems to have disappeared."

"She hasn't disappeared," Margot said, rolling her eyes. "Maybe she left, but she didn't disappear, no matter what Claudia thinks. She sneaked off once before, and I'm sure that's what she did this time, too. If Claudia hadn't been so hysterical this morning, I would have told her what I saw last night."

"What did you see?" Nancy asked eagerly.

"I saw Miss High and Mighty Armand last night," Margot said, "as I was coming back from the library. She was heading down one of the paths toward that big stone wall at the edge of the campus."

"Really? Was it late?" Nancy asked.

Margot shrugged. "Just before ten."

"Did she see you?" Nancy asked.

Margot shook her head. "It took me a second to tell it was her. She had on jeans and a dark sweater, and the path was shadowy in between the lights."

Nancy wondered if Veronica had worn dark clothes on purpose, so she wouldn't be seen. If Veronica *had* been sneaking off campus, then Margot may have been the last person to have seen her. Nancy continued to pump Margot for information. "Maybe she was just taking a walk," she suggested.

"Sure," Margot scoffed. "And maybe there's really a tooth fairy. Nobody takes a walk that late around here. Besides, we have to be in the dorms at ten." Her eyes narrowed. "How come you're so interested, anyway? Do you know Veronica?"

"Just curious," Nancy replied.

"Well, I'm curious about something, too," Margot said, her eyes still narrow. "What are you doing here? Are you a new kid?"

“Oh, that’s right. You were gone when I left Miss Grey’s office,” Nancy said. “Yes. I’m a new student. I just transferred here from River Heights High.” Nancy quickly came up with an explanation for why she was in Claudia’s room. “Claudia is meeting me later in the dining hall, and she asked if I’d bring her a library book she has to return.”

Nancy went over to the desk she assumed was Claudia’s and looked through a pile of books until she found one that was from the library. “Here it is,” she said, holding it up.

Margot seemed to believe Nancy’s story. “Well, welcome to Brookfield,” she said. “I guess I’d better go.”

“Me, too,” Nancy said. She didn’t want to leave, but she couldn’t search the room while Margot was in it. As the two of them left, Nancy said, “I hope you find those notes.”

“Notes?” Margot looked puzzled.

“The English notes,” Nancy reminded her. “The ones you were looking for.”

“Oh. Right.” Margot smiled slightly. “Thanks, but I guess I’ll have to wing it without them until Veronica gets back.”

It was obvious that Margot had been lying about the notes, Nancy thought. What had she really been doing in room 315?

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“Don’t you like your tuna casserole?” Claudia asked Nancy, with amusement in her eyes. She and Nancy were eating lunch together in the dining hall. It was a light, airy room, with big windows and lots of colorful posters on the walls.

“Well, I’ve had better, I must admit,” Nancy said with a laugh.

“I can’t believe what you told me about Margot Simmons. She absolutely despises Veronica,” Claudia said. “I think Margot would rather flunk than borrow her notes.”

“I figured she just made that up on the spot,” Nancy said. She poked her casserole with a fork and took another bite.

“Well, Veronica is really smart,” Claudia said. “Maybe Margot wanted to steal her notes—except Margot isn’t exactly stupid herself. At least, she must have pretty good grades. She’s here at

Brookfield on a scholarship, like I am. Anyway, Margot can't stand Veronica. I really don't think she'd borrow her notes."

"What does she have against Veronica?" Nancy asked. "Is it just because Veronica's father is in movies and has all that fame and money?"

"That's part of it, I guess," Claudia said. "Margot's always saying how her parents have to work hard for their money, and it's obvious that she resents anybody who's rich." Claudia took a sip of juice. "But it's more than that," she went on. "Margot and Veronica are big rivals on the school newspaper. They're both good reporters, and they sort of compete to see who can get the most stories printed. For Veronica, it's kind of fun, but Margot takes it really seriously."

Maybe Margot had been looking for some of Veronica's notes on a story, Nancy thought. She wondered just how seriously Margot took the newspaper rivalry. Seriously enough to try to get Veronica out of the way? It didn't seem likely, but Nancy knew she couldn't ignore the possibility.

Just then Miss Grey walked up to the table. "Any news, Nancy?" the director asked.

Nancy glanced around the crowded cafeteria and lowered her voice. "I'm just getting started, really. But I do know that Veronica is definitely not around the campus."

Miss Grey nodded. "I wanted to let you both know that I reached Mr. Armand in England," she said. "He's very concerned, naturally. He's sending one of his own security men to see what can be found out. The man is already here in the States, at Mr. Armand's home in New York City, so he should arrive later this afternoon."

"Good," Nancy said. "What about the police? Did you decide to call them?"

"No. Mr. Armand insisted that I let his man investigate first," Miss Grey explained.

"Publicity," Claudia said. "I bet he doesn't want any."

"I suppose," Miss Grey agreed. "But he's also not sure that there's any need for police yet."

“You mean Mr. Armand thinks it’s a stunt, like the other time?” Claudia asked.

“He thinks it’s possible,” Miss Grey said. “But that doesn’t mean he’s not worried, Claudia. He is, and I’ve promised to keep in close touch with him.”

“Veronica wouldn’t just take off for this long,” Claudia said miserably. “I *know* something’s wrong.”

Nancy reached over and squeezed the girl’s arm. “Try not to get so upset, Claudia. We’ll find your roommate.”

• • •

Shortly after lunch Bess and George returned with clothes and supplies for Nancy, including a big bag of chocolate chip cookies. “And we didn’t eat a single one,” Bess declared, putting the bag down on the desk in Nancy’s dorm room.

“That’s because Hannah gave us a second bag for ourselves,” George said with a laugh. “That one’s almost empty.”

“Thanks, guys,” Nancy said as she put some shirts away in the dresser.

“This is a fantastic room,” Bess said. “Nice carpeting and a picture window—Brookfield really has style.”

“Speaking of style,” George said, “you look just like the other students in that green blazer, Nancy. Do you remember any trig?” she added teasingly.

“I think I’d need a refresher course in that,” Nancy said with a laugh. “Anyway, I don’t think I’ll be spending much time in classes.” She stuck her hands in her pockets and leaned against the dresser. “Claudia has two of these blazers, so she loaned me one. It’s a lot easier to ask questions if everybody thinks I’m just a curious new student.”

“No Veronica yet?” George asked.

Nancy shook her head. “I’ve talked to a lot of girls, but nobody saw her after ten last night.” She told Bess and George about the rivalry between Veronica and Margot. “I want to talk to the editor of the newspaper,” she added, “and find out more about it. And I’d like to talk to students who know Veronica.

Maybe they could tell me if she'd be likely to go off somewhere on her own."

"Well, we'd better let you get back to work," Bess said.

"Are you sure you don't want us to stick around?" George asked. "We could talk to some of the students for you."

"Thanks," Nancy said, "but I think it'd be better if I do it alone for now. Mr. Armand doesn't want any publicity about this. If there were three of us asking about Veronica, it would start to get obvious that something's wrong. Miss Grey hasn't said anything to the students yet. I don't think they realize Veronica is missing—except for Margot and Claudia, of course."

"Okay, but give us a call if you change your mind," Bess said. She and George headed for the door. "Oh—Hannah sends her love and says be careful."

Nancy smiled. "Give her my love and tell her not to worry."

After George and Bess had left, Nancy walked over to the office of the school's newspaper, *The Brookfield Banner*. It was in a big building with the science labs and other classrooms. A freckled, redheaded girl sitting at a computer told Nancy that the student editor, Jane Forsman, wasn't in.

"I think she's in French class right now," the girl said. "I'm pretty sure she's got English after that. She'll probably be back in a couple of hours."

"Thanks," Nancy said. "Oh, by the way, my name's Nancy. I just transferred here from River Heights High."

"Welcome to Brookfield," the girl said with a friendly smile. "I'm Jenny Pike. How do you like it here so far?"

"It seems great. It's a lot different from what I'm used to, though," Nancy said. "So many students here have famous parents, I feel like I should ask for autographs."

"I know what you mean." Jenny laughed, and leaned closer to Nancy, her elbows on the desk. "Did you know that Veronica Armand goes here? Nicholas Armand's daughter?"

"Wow, really? I'm a big fan of his," Nancy said.

"Veronica works on the paper," Jenny said.

Nancy looked around the office. "Is she here now?"

Jenny shook her head. "She usually spends a lot of time here, but I haven't seen her today. Hey, Donna," she called to a dark-haired girl working at another computer. "Have you seen Veronica?"

"Nope." Donna didn't look up from her monitor. "She wasn't in assembly this morning, either."

"I guess you know that we have to go to morning assembly, for announcements and stuff," Jenny said to Nancy. "It's really boring—you'll find out. I wonder why Veronica wasn't there."

"She probably overslept," Donna said. "Or sneaked out."

"Sneaked out?" Nancy asked Jenny. "Does Veronica do that often?"

"No," Jenny said. "She did it once and got caught. It was just a joke, remember?"

"Yeah, right," Donna said.

Jenny sighed. Lowering her voice, she told Nancy, "Some people think Veronica won't follow the rules because she's spoiled. I guess she *is* a little spoiled. But she gets good grades, and she works really hard on the newspaper."

"Well, I'll catch her another time, I'm sure," Nancy said. She didn't want to seem too obvious about her interest in Veronica, so she thanked the two girls and left the *Banner* office.

Nancy spent most of the afternoon talking to other students about Veronica. Nobody seemed too worried that she wasn't around. But then, Nancy reminded herself, Veronica hadn't been gone that long.

Early in the evening, while everyone was in the dining hall for dinner, Nancy decided to go back to Room 315 and look around.

Nancy listened at the door, then knocked. She didn't want to surprise anyone a second time. When she didn't hear anything, she quietly let herself in the room. Then she walked over to the closet Claudia had said was Veronica's.

The closet was stuffed with clothes. Nancy decided she would have to check with Claudia about any missing items. There were three suitcases and a small bag stacked on the shelf. The dresser

drawers were full, too. If Veronica had been planning to leave, she was traveling light, Nancy thought.

Next, Nancy went to Veronica's desk. On a cork board above it were several snapshots. One was of a pretty, smiling girl with long dark hair. Her eyes were dark brown, almost black, just like Nicholas Armand's. Nancy took the photo down and put it in her pocket. If she had to go off campus looking for Veronica Armand, she'd need to show people her picture.

Notebooks and papers were scattered on top of the desk. The drawer that Margot had been searching through was partially open.

Then Nancy found something interesting—a thick spiral notebook with the word *English* written on the cover in black felt-tip marker. Flipping through the pages, she saw notes on the plays and poems Veronica was studying. Now Nancy was sure Margot had been lying about wanting to borrow the notebook.

Nancy continued to search the top of the desk. Under the telephone she found a small notepad and pulled it out. The top page was blank, but she could see that someone, probably Veronica, had written something on the page before the top one and ripped the paper off the pad.

Quickly Nancy searched in a drawer until she found a pencil. Using the side of the lead, she shaded over the indentations. After a moment the words came clear: 10:30. Orchard and Sagamore. The time was right, she realized with excitement—Veronica had been seen shortly before ten. Finally Nancy had a clue.

At that moment the door was flung open. Startled, Nancy spun around. Then she gasped.

Standing in the doorway was a tall man in a dark suit and a beige trenchcoat. He had gray hair, piercing blue eyes, and a sleek silver gun in his right hand.

The gun was pointed straight at Nancy!

4

A Clash of Wills

Nancy didn't take her eyes off the gun. She could feel her heart pounding, but she forced herself to speak calmly. "I think you should put that gun away," she told the man. "I'm sure you have some reason for pointing it at me, but whatever it is, it's not worth getting in trouble for."

"In trouble?" the man said. He spoke calmly, too, and looked almost amused. "And who is going to get me in trouble?"

"I'll have to call campus security if you don't put the gun down," Nancy said smoothly.

"Go ahead and call them," the man said. "And then you can tell all of us what you're doing in Miss Armand's room."

"Fine," Nancy said. "I'm sure they'll be interested to know that there's an armed man in the dorm."

"They already know about me," he said. "But I bet they don't know about you."

Nancy reached for the phone.

"Look, let's stop playing games," the man said. He put the gun in a shoulder holster, then took out his wallet and flashed it at Nancy. "I'm Phil Kroger," he said. "Private security services for Nicholas Armand."

Nancy took the card and read it. It had both Kroger's name on it and his employer's. She remembered that Miss Grey had said a security man was on his way. "Okay," she said, handing the card to Kroger.

"Now what about you?" Phil Kroger asked, his eyes watchful.

"My name's Nancy Drew," she told him. "I'm a detective."

"Nice try," Kroger said. He eyed Nancy's Brookfield blazer. "You really expect me to believe that?"

Nicholas Armand sure didn't pick this guy for his charm, Nancy thought. "Miss Grey, Brookfield's director, will be glad to tell you who I am," she replied.

"Good idea," Kroger said, waving one hand toward the door. "Come on, let's go. I'm sure Miss Grey will be interested to know that I found one of her students in Veronica's room."

"Fine," Nancy agreed. "She'll back me up."

When they reached the administration building, no one was in the outer office. Miss Grey's door was open, though, and the director was sitting at her desk, reading some papers. When Nancy and Kroger walked in, Miss Grey looked up in surprise.

"Mr. Kroger," she said, "I see you've met Nancy Drew. I intended to tell you about her, but you left my office so quickly that I—"

"Wait a minute," Kroger interrupted. "Are you telling me this kid is really a detective?"

"Yes, she is," Miss Grey said. "Quite a good one, too, from what I've heard." She glanced at Nancy. "I called the River Heights Police Department this afternoon, Nancy, to find out more about you. Chief McGinnis recommended you highly."

"Thank you," Nancy said. "We've worked on a lot of cases together. Maybe Mr. Kroger should call him, too."

"Oh?" Miss Grey looked at them curiously. "Is there a problem?"

"Afraid so," Kroger said. "The last thing I need is a kid detective on this case." He frowned at Nancy. "No offense, Miss Drew. I'm here now, and Mr. Armand expects me to take charge."

"I understand," Nancy said. "You work for him and I don't. But Claudia Dixon, Veronica's roommate, asked me to help out, and Miss Grey said okay." She turned to the director. "I think it should be up to you whether I quit."

"Look, Miss Drew," Kroger said before the director had a chance to respond, "nobody knows what's happened to Miss Armand, or even if anything *has* happened. It's my job to find out. It's going to be tough enough without—"

Suddenly the phone rang. Miss Grey answered, then put her hand over the receiver. "Excuse me, I have to take this call," she said softly. "Please wait in the outer office. I'm sure everything can be worked out."

Nancy and Phil Kroger went into the other office and closed the door.

"Listen, Mr. Kroger," Nancy began, "I know you think I'm going to be a pest. But I'm a detective, not a kid playing detective. I want to find Veronica, too, and I think I can help."

Kroger sat down in one of the chairs. "You can help by staying out of this."

"But we're both on the same side," Nancy insisted. "And I'm sure Mr. Armand would want any help he can get when it comes to his daughter's safety."

"Don't think you can threaten me," Kroger said angrily. "You've never even met Mr. Armand. I work for the guy, remember? I don't need some teenager telling me about my boss."

Nancy held her temper. "All I meant was that I'd think Mr. Armand would welcome my help," she said. "And maybe you should, too."

Kroger sat silent for a moment. "Okay," he said finally, leaning back in the chair and crossing his arms. "Let's see what kind of detective you are. Tell me what you've found out so far."

Nancy decided that cooperating with the man might be the best thing for the case, even though it appeared he'd be difficult to work with. Briefly she told Kroger what she'd learned about Veronica's supposed disappearance. Then she took the sheet of notepaper she'd found on Veronica's desk and showed it to him.

"Ten-thirty," Kroger read. "Orchard and Sagamore."

"Another student saw Veronica last night, about ten," Nancy said, "and it looked as if she was heading off campus. I think she might have gotten a phone call to meet somebody. It's worth checking out."

Kroger nodded and pocketed the piece of paper. "I'll take care of it."

Nancy was about to tell him she'd do it herself when the door to the hallway opened and Margot came in. Nancy hoped Kroger wouldn't say anything more. She certainly didn't want Margot to know she was on the case.

But Kroger sat in stony silence. And instead of asking what Nancy was doing there, Margot looked a little flustered.

"Miss Grey lets me use the computer for some of my reports and stuff," she said quickly to Nancy. "Most of the kids here have their own."

"They're expensive, I know," Nancy said. She noticed that Margot hadn't brought any books or papers with her.

Phil Kroger stood up and walked over to look at a framed print of the Brookfield campus hanging on one of the walls. Margot glanced at him, then at Nancy, a questioning look in her eyes.

At that moment the door to the inner office opened, and Miss Grey stuck her head out. "Nancy, Mr. Kroger, come in, please." She looked at Margot. "Didn't you finish my letters yesterday?"

"Yes, but I'm . . . I've got a paper due in English," Margot said. Quickly she opened a desk drawer and pulled out a spiral notebook.

Miss Grey nodded approvingly. "Good. That's important." She motioned at Nancy and Kroger. As soon as they'd entered her office, she shut the door behind them.

"Sorry for taking so long," she said, walking behind her desk and sitting down. "But I hope you two had a chance to settle your differences."

Nancy started to say something, but Phil Kroger cut her off. "I'm going to have to check with Mr. Armand on this," he said. "He sent me here to do a job. I don't know what he'll think about somebody else working on it, too."

"I don't see why he should mind," Nancy said. "I just can't believe he'd turn down help for his daughter."

"Nancy, I understand your point," Miss Grey said. "But in one sense, Mr. Kroger is right—it's Mr. Armand's daughter who's

missing. Perhaps he should be the one to have the final say about this.”

Just then the phone rang again.

“Margot will get it,” Miss Grey said.

But the phone rang twice more. Margot must have left already, Nancy thought. That was odd. She couldn’t have gotten very far on her English paper.

When the phone rang a fourth time, Miss Grey picked it up. “Yes?” she answered in an impatient tone.

As Nancy watched, the director’s face suddenly went pale. With a shaking hand, she reached out and pushed a button on the phone.

“Would you please repeat that?” Miss Grey said, her voice quavering slightly.

The button she’d pushed had turned on the phone’s speaker, which allowed everyone in the office to hear the voice on the other end of the line. It was low and slightly muffled, and it sounded like a man’s voice. The words came over the speaker clearly.

“We’ve got Veronica Armand,” the caller said. “She’s alive and unharmed—so far.”

A Promising Connection

There were a few seconds of tense silence in the room as the caller's meaning began to sink in: Veronica Armand's disappearance wasn't a stunt. She'd been kidnapped!

Miss Grey's face grew even paler. Phil Kroger stared intently at the telephone, his eyes narrowed to slits.

Nancy strode closer to the desk. "If you're holding Veronica Armand," she said loudly, "prove it. Let her talk to us."

"You've got it all wrong," the muffled voice replied coldly. "We give the orders. You follow them. *If* you want the girl back safely."

"How do we even know she's with you?" Nancy asked.

Phil Kroger stepped up beside Nancy. "Are you crazy?" he whispered. "You want to get Veronica killed?" Then, more loudly, he spoke to the caller. "What do you want?" he asked.

"Not so fast," the caller said. "First of all, you don't go to the police. You don't go to the FBI. You don't tell anyone. We'll know if you do, got it?"

"Right," Kroger said. "What happens next?"

"You'll find out soon enough," the caller replied. "Just remember—keep your mouths shut if you want to see Veronica Armand again. We'll be in touch." There was a click as the caller hung up.

Miss Grey stared at the phone with frightened eyes. Nancy could tell she was trying to keep calm. The director cleared her throat and asked, "What should we do?"

"Call the police," Nancy said firmly.

"Are you crazy?" Phil Kroger asked again. "You heard what the guy said."

"I already told Chief McGinnis that Nancy was working on this," Miss Grey said worriedly.

"But you didn't tell him about a kidnapping," Kroger said.

"We should still call the police," Nancy told him. "And we should have insisted on talking to Veronica."

"But, Nancy," Miss Grey said, "surely someone who *hadn't* kidnapped Veronica wouldn't call and say he had."

"That's probably true," Nancy agreed. "But we need proof that Veronica's okay before we do anything."

"Wrong." Phil Kroger picked up the phone. "Before anyone does anything," he said, glaring at Nancy, "I call Mr. Armand."

Nancy didn't argue. After all, Nicholas Armand certainly had a right to know that his daughter had been kidnapped.

After a few minutes the overseas call was connected. Quickly but calmly Phil Kroger told Nicholas Armand what had happened. Then he punched the button to the speaker on the phone.

"I can get to the airport in an hour." The rich voice of the famous actor and director filled the room. "I just told my secretary to book me a flight. I'll be at Brookfield sometime tomorrow morning."

"Yes, Mr. Armand," Kroger said.

"Miss Grey," Armand said, "put out some kind of story on campus about Veronica, will you? Let's see . . . say I had to fly to New York on business and I wanted her to spend some time with me. That'll satisfy everybody's curiosity about where she is."

"All right," Miss Grey agreed. "It will keep the students from panicking, too."

"Right. Phil, see if Miss Grey can fix you up with some kind of office space there," Armand said. "And, Phil—don't do anything until I get there. If the kidnappers call before I arrive, tell them you can't make a move without my say-so. Whatever you do, don't go to the police. Not yet, anyway."

"I already decided that," Kroger said sharply. He seemed annoyed that Armand would tell him how to do his job.

"See you tomorrow." Armand hung up.

“You heard him, Miss Drew,” Kroger said. “No police.”

Nancy nodded. But she wondered why Phil Kroger hadn’t tried to talk Mr. Armand into contacting the police.

If he won’t try to convince him, Nancy thought, then I will. As soon as Mr. Armand gets here.

• • •

The next morning Nancy got up early and went straight to Miss Grey’s office to see if there was any more news on the kidnapping.

As she dashed along the path toward the administration building, a voice called out, “Hey, Nancy!”

Nancy turned and saw Jenny, the red-haired girl from the newspaper office. She was in a green sweatsuit, jogging along another path. “Hi,” Nancy called back.

“Did Veronica show up yet?” Jenny asked.

“Not yet,” Nancy said truthfully. “I heard she flew to New York to see her father.”

“That sounds great,” Jenny said, running in place. “Don’t forget morning assembly. It’s in twenty minutes.”

Nancy smiled and waved as Jenny ran on. She decided to tell anyone who asked why she had missed assembly that she’d been meeting Miss Grey about her class schedule.

“Any news?” Nancy asked breathlessly when she went into Miss Grey’s office.

“Nothing,” Miss Grey said, looking tired and worried.

“We should be hearing from Mr. Armand soon,” Kroger said. He was staring out the window, not bothering to look at Nancy.

At ten o’clock Mr. Armand called from his car phone to let them know he was on his way. Half an hour later the famous actor arrived. He was as tall and handsome as he looked on screen, with a strong, square jaw and dark hair.

Nancy could see that Armand’s famous dark brown eyes were tired and filled with worry, but his voice was calm. Maybe his training as an actor helped keep him from falling apart, Nancy

thought. She also noticed that Phil Kroger grew edgy the minute his boss walked into the room.

Miss Grey introduced Nancy, but before she got a chance to explain who Nancy was, Kroger spoke up.

“No more calls yet, Mr. Armand,” he reported. “I stayed here the whole night. Miss Grey’s been letting me use an adjoining office.”

“Thank you, Miss Grey.” Armand turned back to Kroger. “What about other students?” he asked. His voice was harder now, and he fired off his questions like bullets. “Did any of them see anything? Did you talk to Veronica’s roommate?”

Nancy spoke up. “I did, Mr. Armand, before we learned that Veronica had been kidnapped. Claudia was worried about Veronica being gone and asked me to help out. I’ve also talked to several girls on campus,” she added. “No one seems to know a thing.”

Armand frowned at her. “Sorry, but I don’t understand.” Turning to Kroger, he said sharply, “I thought we’d agreed to keep quiet about this.”

Kroger nodded grimly. “Like she said, Miss Drew walked into this before I even got here,” he explained. “She claims to be a detective.”

Armand raised his eyebrows and looked curiously at Nancy. “A detective? Is this true?”

Nancy nodded. She was hoping Miss Grey might say something in her favor, but the director seemed nervous and didn’t speak up. Nancy decided she couldn’t blame her. After all, one of her students had been kidnapped. Veronica wasn’t the only celebrity’s daughter at Brookfield, either. Miss Grey must be worried about security for everyone.

“I have lots of experience,” Nancy told Armand. “I’ve been posing as a student, so I’m able to talk to the other girls without them knowing I’m a detective.”

“Hmm.” Armand smiled slightly. “Well, that’s more than my man here can do. Right, Phil?”

Phil Kroger gritted his teeth and tried to smile, too.

"I don't see any harm in letting Miss Drew find out what she can," Armand said.

Kroger shook his head. "Mr. Armand, I have to object. This is a dangerous situation—I don't have to tell you that. The fewer people in on this, the better."

"But Miss Drew's already in on it," Armand pointed out. "And she's right about posing as a student. It could be very helpful."

Kroger shook his head again. "Mr. Armand, I—"

"No, she should stay on," Armand interrupted. He had made up his mind. "And be sure you share any information you find with her, Phil."

Kroger didn't say any more, but Nancy could tell he was not happy. Even though Nancy didn't like Kroger, she couldn't blame him for being a little annoyed at his boss. Mr. Armand didn't appear to be an easy person to work for.

"Thank you, Mr. Armand," Nancy said. "I don't like to ask this, but . . . is there anyone who might use Veronica to get at you?"

"Do I have any enemies, you mean?" Armand laughed. "Well, I'm sure there are plenty of people who don't like me, Miss Drew. But no one's ever threatened me about anything."

No lead there, Nancy thought. "There's one thing we should all talk about now that you're here," she said. "Contacting the police."

"You heard the caller, Miss Drew," Mr. Armand said. "No police."

"But a kidnapper always says that," Nancy told him. "Really, the police know how to deal with this."

Miss Grey finally spoke. "Nancy, the caller said they'd know if we got in touch with the police."

"I'd be willing to bet that was a bluff," Nancy said.

"But what if it wasn't?" Miss Grey asked. "What if we bring in the police and something terrible happens?"

"Something terrible's already happened," Nancy reminded her.

"That's enough." Nicholas Armand paced the room a moment, then stopped and looked at the others. "My daughter's life is already in jeopardy. I'm not going to take any chances on putting her in even more danger." He stared at Nancy. "You're welcome to work on this case, Miss Drew. But no police, do you understand?"

Reluctantly Nancy agreed. Phil Kroger must be happy now, she thought.

A few minutes later Nicholas Armand left. He'd booked a suite a few miles from the Brookfield campus, at the Willow Inn.

Phil Kroger headed into the small office adjoining Miss Grey's, and Nancy followed him.

"There's one more thing we should talk about," she said.

"What?" Kroger asked impatiently. He shut the door and headed for the desk. "Do you have any new information?"

"No," Nancy said. "But it's about that note I found on Veronica's desk. It could be a lead. If you haven't had a chance to check it out yet, I will."

"I went over there this morning, early," Kroger said, sitting down at the desk. "It's a run-down area about a mile from campus. Nothing there but a diner, a gas station, and a convenience store. As a lead, it's a dead end."

"Did you talk to anybody?" Nancy asked.

Kroger stared at her coldly. "I said I checked it out, Miss Drew."

"But it was early morning. If Veronica went there, she went at night," Nancy pointed out. "There would probably be different people around then. Maybe one of us should go back tonight."

Kroger stood up. "Look," he said, "Armand said to let you help out. I don't like it one bit, but what he wants, he gets. But don't try to tell me how to do my job, Miss Junior Detective."

"It was just a suggestion," Nancy said quietly. "I know you don't want me working on this, but as long as I am, I think we should cooperate. For Veronica's sake."

"It's for her sake I don't want you in on this," Kroger said angrily. "Whoever kidnapped Armand's daughter is probably

going to want around a million bucks for her. This is the big league, Miss Drew. I don't think you should be playing in it."

Kroger came out from behind his desk and stood about a foot from Nancy. "Stay out of my way," he told her, his voice low and menacing. "If you mess things up, you'll pay. And that's not a threat. That's a promise!"

6

New Suspicions

“All right, Mr. Kroger,” Nancy said, controlling her anger. She might be making an enemy, but she had to speak her mind. “And I’ll make *you* a promise. If anyone ‘messes up’ on this case, it won’t be me.”

Without giving him a chance to answer, Nancy turned and left the office.

• • •

“That Kroger guy sounds terrible,” Bess said indignantly. “What are you going to do?”

Nancy picked up the phone and brought it over to her dorm bed, where she leaned back and smiled. “What I always do,” she said. “Stick to the case and do the best I can. Phil Kroger will just have to take it or leave it.”

“Right,” George agreed. She was at Bess’s house, talking on another extension. Nancy had promised to keep her friends up to date on what was happening. She’d gone back to the dorm and called right after leaving the administration building.

“Nancy,” Bess said, “you’re probably too involved in the case to pay much attention to anything else, right?”

“What is it?” Nancy asked.

George chuckled. “She wants to know what Nicholas Armand’s really like.”

“I can’t help it,” Bess said. “Is he as good-looking in real life as he is on screen?”

“Actually, he’s not,” Nancy replied. “He’s short and has a potbelly and washed-out eyes. He must wear contacts in his films.”

There was a short silence. Then Bess said, "You're kidding, right?"

"Yep." Nancy couldn't help laughing. "He's very good-looking, Bess. He wasn't exactly charming, but maybe that's because he's so worried."

"He must be terribly upset," Bess agreed. "I wonder why Veronica's been kidnapped."

"Money, what else?" George said.

"It could be that," Nancy said. "Or it might be revenge against Mr. Armand, even though he can't think of anyone who'd want to do that. It could even be revenge against Veronica, for some reason. If I could find out why, I might be able to find out who."

As soon as Nancy had hung up, there was a knock at her door. "I'm going crazy!" Claudia Dixon said, as Nancy let her into the room. "I can't concentrate on any of my classes. All I can think about is Veronica. Have you found out where she is?"

Nancy shook her head. She didn't want to tell Claudia about the kidnapping, but maybe if she did, Claudia would think a little harder and come up with some kind of lead. Besides, the girl was so worried about Veronica. It wasn't fair to keep her in the dark.

"Actually," Nancy said, "I have found out one thing that we didn't know yesterday. Claudia, I'm afraid Veronica's been kidnapped."

Claudia's dark eyes widened as Nancy told her about the phone call. "I can't believe it!" she cried, pacing around the room. "Who would do something like that?"

"Unfortunately, there are plenty of people who'd do it," Nancy said quietly. "It'll probably be impossible, but don't worry too much, okay? We'll get Veronica back. Just try to remember anything—even if it seems stupid—that might give me some kind of clue."

"I'll try," Claudia said doubtfully. "So far I haven't thought of anything."

“Well, maybe something will come to you,” Nancy said. “Anyway, in case people start asking you questions, the story is that Veronica flew to New York for a couple of days to see her father. And, Claudia,” she added, “you have to promise not to tell *anyone* about the kidnapping. It could be dangerous for Veronica if you do.”

Claudia stopped pacing. “You mean you think somebody in school is involved?” she asked.

“I don’t think anything yet,” Nancy told her. “Right now I have to be suspicious of just about everybody.”

Nancy didn’t mention that Margot might be a suspect, but as soon as Claudia left for class, she decided to go back to the school newspaper office. Margot Simmons seemed to have a serious grudge against Veronica Armand and had lied about looking for her English notes in Veronica’s room. It was time to find out what she’d really been looking for.

Nancy found the editor, Jane Forsman, in the back of the office. The dark-blond girl was going over a story for the next issue.

After introducing herself as a new student, Nancy said she was interested in working on the paper. “I’d love to write stories, naturally,” she said. “But I heard you’ve already got two great writers.”

“We can always use more,” Jane said with a smile. She pushed her glasses up on top of her head. “Who’ve you heard about?”

“Margot Simmons and Veronica Armand,” Nancy said. “Somebody told me they’re always battling for the top stories.”

Jane laughed. “That’s for sure. Everybody gets a chance to write, but those two really are the best. And you’re right about the battles,” she added, rolling her eyes. “Talk about competition.”

“You mean it’s not friendly?” Nancy asked.

“Hardly.” Jane thought a minute, then said, “Actually, Margot’s the one who really takes it seriously. Not that Veronica doesn’t, but sometimes I think Margot’s out for blood.”

“Really?” That was a very interesting way to put it, Nancy thought.

Jane nodded. “Margot always tries to be the best in everything, which is ridiculous. Maybe it’s because she’s afraid she might lose her scholarship if she isn’t number one.” She shook her head. “Anyway, I guess Veronica’s going to lose out on next week’s issue. That should make Margot happy.”

“Why would Veronica lose out?” Nancy asked.

“Well, I haven’t seen her around,” Jane said.

“Her roommate told me she went to New York,” Nancy said.

“You’re kidding. For how long?”

“Just a few days, I think,” Nancy said.

“Well, that’s nice for Veronica,” Jane said. “But there’s this really important story about some land that the school’s thinking of buying for a new science building,” Jane explained. “It’ll mean cutting down part of a forest, and there’s a big debate going on about it.”

“Was Veronica going to write it?”

Jane nodded. “Margot was furious, but she was working on something else, so I gave the story to Veronica,” she said. “Veronica said she’d have a first draft by today. I can’t believe she went off to New York without doing it. That’s not like her.” She frowned. “Was it an emergency or something?”

“I don’t think so,” Nancy said. “Her father was flying in to New York and wanted to see her. I guess it was kind of a last-minute thing.”

“Oh.” Jane shrugged. “Well, if Veronica doesn’t get back in time, you can bet Margot will jump at the chance to do the story.” She glanced at the big clock on the wall. “Uh-oh, time for calculus—I’ve got to hurry. Listen,” she went on as she started gathering her notebooks, “come back tomorrow or whenever, okay? We always need people on the paper.”

“Thanks,” Nancy said.

At the door Jane stopped and turned back. “And if you see Veronica,” she said, “tell her to hurry up with that story.”

Nancy smiled and said she would. But she wondered when—if ever—she'd see Veronica Armand.

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After dinner that evening Nancy called home to let Hannah know she was all right.

"How's the food at that fancy school?" Hannah asked.

"Terrible," Nancy said with a laugh. "Tonight it was rubbery roast chicken and mushy green beans."

"Let me guess," Hannah said. "You're filling up on chocolate chip cookies."

"That's right," Nancy agreed. "They're delicious."

"Well, be sure you eat a good breakfast, at least," Hannah told her.

"I'll try," Nancy promised. "Did Dad call?"

"Yes, last night. I told him you were on a case," Hannah said. "He told me to tell you good luck and be careful."

They chatted for a few more minutes, and then said goodbye. She needed some luck, Nancy admitted to herself as she hung up. But if some didn't come her way, then she'd just have to make her own.

About an hour later most of the girls in the dorm had settled down. It was dark outside, but inside, the desk and bed lamps were lit as the Brookfield students hit the books.

Nancy was restless, wondering when the kidnapper would contact them next. She wanted to be there when the call came. Even though the voice had been disguised, she might be able to hear something—maybe a background noise—that would give her a clue as to where Veronica was being held. And she would insist that Veronica be allowed to speak.

Nancy knew that Phil Kroger was probably in his office right now, waiting for the call. Even though he'd made it plain he didn't want anything to do with her, she decided to go over to the administration building. She wasn't getting anything done in the dorm, and if the call came tonight, she'd miss it.

It was cool out, so Nancy put on a teal-blue sweatsuit and sneakers and left the dorm.

The brisk wind sent leaves skittering across the paths. A few students were going back to the dorms from the library, and Nancy was glad to see several security guards keeping an eye on things. Until they knew who'd kidnapped Veronica and why, nobody was really safe.

The front door of the administration building was locked. Nancy trotted around to the back, hoping to find a security guard or someone who'd let her in. Just as she rounded a corner, she spotted Miss Grey. The director was walking toward the parking area in the back.

"Miss Grey!" Nancy called out.

The director gasped, then let her breath out in relief as Nancy ran up to her.

"Sorry," Nancy said. "I didn't mean to startle you. I guess we're all a little edgy after what's happened."

"Yes," Miss Grey agreed. "Did you want to talk to me about something?"

Nancy explained why she'd come.

"Oh, well, of course you can go in and wait," Miss Grey said. "But I'm afraid you'll be on your own."

"Phil Kroger's not there?" Nancy asked.

Miss Grey shook her head. "He left a few minutes ago," she said. "He didn't say where he was going, but I expect he's gone over to the Willow Inn to talk to Mr. Armand."

"It's a good thing I came, then," Nancy said. "The kidnappers didn't say when they'd call back. Somebody ought to be here, at least for a while."

"Yes, I—" Miss Grey stopped and cleared her throat. "I would have stayed, but I'm afraid I . . . well, I made important plans, and they can't be canceled."

Miss Grey couldn't be expected to stick around every second, Nancy thought. Still, she wished the school's director had at least called her and told her the office was going to be empty.

But Miss Grey looked as if she had a lot on her mind. Whatever her plans were, they must be important.

Miss Grey opened her briefcase, took out a small pad and pencil, and wrote something down. "This is a pass," she said, ripping off a sheet of paper and handing it to Nancy. "Here, take another one in case you want to leave campus at any time in the future. A security guard will be making his rounds in an hour or so. This pass will let him know you're cleared."

"What about your office?" Nancy asked. "Is it locked?"

"I left it open for Mr. Kroger," Miss Grey explained. "I suppose I should have some duplicate keys made for you both."

"Can I get into the building?" Nancy asked. "The front door was locked."

"Yes, yes," Miss Grey said, hurriedly checking her watch. "The rear door's open. There's a teachers' conference going on right now on the second floor. Now I really must run."

Nancy thanked her and watched as the older woman hurried across the parking lot. Miss Grey's light tan car was sitting under one of the outdoor lights. The car was at least ten years old. One fender was badly dented and starting to rust. The license plate was rusting, too. Nancy was slightly surprised that the director of the Brookfield Academy would drive such a car.

After Miss Grey drove off, Nancy went inside the building. The offices along the hallway were empty and dark. Even though there was a meeting going on upstairs, Nancy couldn't hear anything but the squeak of her sneakers on the tile floor.

As she let herself into the outer room of the director's office, Nancy breathed a sigh of relief that Phil Kroger wasn't there. Besides waiting for a call from the kidnapper, Nancy wanted to check the file on Margot Simmons. It would be easier to get the job done without Mr. Kroger looking over her shoulder.

Maybe, Nancy thought as she pulled open a filing cabinet drawer, Margot's grades were sliding. If they were, then her work on the newspaper might improve her record and save her scholarship. But if she didn't get the most important stories—like Veronica's story about cutting down part of a forest—she

might get desperate. Maybe even desperate enough to try to get Veronica out of the way.

There were a lot of maybes, Nancy knew, but she had to check them out.

Nancy found Margot's file quickly, and her eyes raced over the girl's grades for the last quarter. Three C's. Two B's.

Not good enough. Not failing, but not scholarship grades, either. Margot must be worried about them, Nancy thought, slipping the file back in place. She'd taken out several other folders as she'd looked for Margot's. As she started to put them back, one of them slipped from her hands and fell to the floor.

As Nancy bent to gather the scattered papers, one of them caught her attention. Still kneeling on the floor, she began to read it, and her eyes widened.

Dear Miss Grey,

Enclosed you will find your current monthly statement for the care of your mother. As you can see, you are now three months behind in payment. We have tried to be as flexible as possible about this, but we really must insist that all back payments, as well as the current one, be made by the end of this month.

The letter was signed by an accountant from the Riverview Nursing Home.

The statement of expenses made Nancy gasp. To keep her mother in the nursing home, Miss Grey had to pay twelve hundred dollars a month. And according to the letter, she was three months behind in her payments.

Calculating quickly, Nancy figured that twelve hundred a month added up to almost fifteen thousand dollars a year. It would be difficult for almost anyone to pay. And it looked as if it was becoming impossible for Miss Grey.

Now Nancy understood why Miss Grey had seemed so worried. Having to come up with a payment that large by the end of the month would make anybody nervous. On top of that,

Veronica had been kidnapped. Nancy was surprised Miss Grey wasn't a total wreck.

Suddenly Nancy remembered Miss Grey fiddling with her necklace when she'd learned Nancy was a detective. She recalled that at first Miss Grey was willing to believe that Veronica might have sneaked off, and how easily Nicholas Armand had convinced her not to call the police.

Nancy remembered something else, too—what she herself had said to Bess and George. If she could find out *why* Veronica had been kidnapped, maybe she could find out *who*.

Being in debt to a nursing home was certainly a reason why. Could Brookfield's director have arranged the kidnapping of one of her own students?

Bumps in the Night

Suddenly Nancy heard footsteps out in the hallway. Carefully but quickly she replaced the folders and shut the file drawer. Just as she'd moved away from the cabinet, the door opened and Phil Kroger came in. He was carrying a take-out cup of coffee.

When he saw Nancy, he frowned. "What are you doing here?"

"I wanted to be here in case the kidnapper called again," she told him. "How's Mr. Armand?"

"Worried, of course," Kroger said, heading into Miss Grey's office. Over his shoulder he called back, "I'm here now, so you don't have to stay. Why don't you go back to the dorm and keep asking questions?"

The door to the office slammed shut, but Nancy started after the security man. Even if he wasn't going to share any information with her, she had some things to tell him—what she'd learned about Margot and Miss Grey.

Then Nancy stopped. If she told Phil Kroger now of her suspicions about Miss Grey and Margot, he'd probably say she needed stronger evidence. And he'd be right, she realized. She'd found some good leads, but she needed hard evidence to back them up. She should start looking for that evidence now, she decided.

Nancy left the offices and headed out of the building. Phil Kroger had told her he'd gone to Orchard and Sagamore—the streets Veronica had written down—but Nancy wanted to check out the area herself. Kroger might be a top-notch security man, but that didn't mean he couldn't have missed something. Besides, he'd gone there during the day, and Nancy wanted to look the place over at night. It was important to try to find

people who were in the area at the same time Veronica might have been there.

As Nancy ran quickly toward the dorm parking lot, she glanced at her watch. It was eight-thirty, and students had to be in the dorms by ten. That gave her an hour and a half. Luckily she had her car. When Bess and George had brought her clothes, they'd driven two cars, and then left Nancy's at the school. Nancy hopped into her small sports car and drove toward the campus exit.

At the gate a security guard flagged her down and checked her ID and pass.

"Okay," he said, waving her on. "But make sure you're back before ten."

Assuring him she would be, Nancy drove off.

Phil Kroger had said Orchard and Sagamore were in a run-down area about a mile from campus. Nancy was pretty sure she knew the place. It was a small area of stores and a few houses on what used to be the only road to the airport. Since a new highway had been built, the old two-lane road wasn't used too often.

After driving about ten minutes, Nancy saw a blinking yellow light up ahead. Slowing down, she peered out the window and saw a battered sign that read Sagamore Street. It led only one way, so she made the turn. A short distance ahead she could see the lights of an all-night diner and a gas station, just as Phil Kroger had described. There were three or four other buildings, too, but they were dark.

Nancy pulled into the gas station and spotted a sign at the corner for Orchard Road. This is the place, she thought. But had Veronica walked here? Claudia had said her roommate's car was still in the parking lot.

"What'll it be?" the young station attendant asked. He stuffed a magazine into the back pocket of his jeans.

"Fill it with premium, please," Nancy said. She waited until he was washing the windshield, then leaned out. "Does the bus come by here?" she asked.

“Sure does,” he told her. “The last run from River Heights is at nine-thirty. Gets here about ten-fifteen, then heads on to the airport.” He went back to the gas pump.

Nancy remembered seeing a bus stop sign on the road in front of the campus. And Margot had said she’d seen Veronica at the edge of campus close to ten. So Veronica could have taken the bus, Nancy realized. *If* she came here at all.

“That’ll be eight-fifty,” the attendant said, coming around to the driver’s window.

As Nancy took the money from her wallet, she pulled out the snapshot of Veronica. “You didn’t happen to see this girl around here on Sunday night, did you?” she asked, holding out the photograph.

The attendant barely glanced at it. “I don’t work Sunday nights,” he said. “Besides, we close at five-thirty on Sundays.”

“Okay.” Nancy put the picture back. “Thanks, anyway.”

Nancy drove across the street to a diner, where a flashing neon light in one of its windows advertised Twenty-Four-Hour Eats. If Veronica had come here Sunday night, Nancy thought, maybe someone in the diner had seen her.

Pushing open the door, Nancy stepped in and looked around. Only three booths were occupied. The waitress, a middle-aged woman with tightly curled brown hair, seemed to be taking her coffee break at a fourth.

Nancy sat on a high stool in front of the counter. Whoever worked behind the counter would have a full view of the street outside. That was the person she especially wanted to talk to.

Spotting Nancy, the waitress got up and hurried over. “I didn’t see you come in,” she said. She pulled a pencil out of her curly hair and took an order pad from her yellow uniform pocket. “Sorry to keep you waiting.”

“You didn’t,” Nancy said with a smile.

“Mel should be out here,” the waitress said. “He usually works the counter, but it’s been so slow tonight, I guess he decided to take a break, too.”

"I see you're open twenty-four hours," Nancy said. "Is that every day?"

"Seven days a week," the waitress said with a sigh. "Sometimes it feels like eight when you work the night shift. I'm glad I've got Fridays off."

So she worked Sunday nights, Nancy thought. She ordered a cup of tea. When the waitress brought it, Nancy showed her Veronica's picture and asked if she'd seen her.

The waitress studied it for a moment, then shook her head. "Afraid not," she said. "Sunday night, you say?"

Nancy nodded. "Around ten-fifteen or ten-thirty. Business is pretty slow around then, right?"

"Yes, so I'm sure this girl didn't come inside," the waitress said. "And if she was outside, well, I don't spend much time looking out the windows. If I'm not working, I'm usually reading something. It's the best way to pass the time."

"What about Mel?" Nancy asked. "Do you think he might have seen her?"

"Can't hurt to ask." Turning her head, the waitress called, "Mel! Come on out here, would you?" She turned back to Nancy. "Is anything wrong? I mean, did this girl run away or something?"

Nancy hesitated. She didn't want to say the girl had been kidnapped. She was saved from making up a story when a tall, balding man came through the swinging door behind the counter. At the same moment two groups of people entered the diner and took booths, and the waitress had to leave Nancy.

Nancy smiled at Mel. "I understand you were working the counter Sunday night."

Mel nodded. "That's right. You're not here to complain about the food, I hope," he said with a grin. "I don't cook it, I just serve it."

Laughing, Nancy shook her head. "I was hoping you might have seen this girl," she said, holding out Veronica's photograph. "It would have been sometime after ten."

Mel took the photo and looked at it closely. "Funny," he said after only a few seconds. "I wondered what she was doing here."

"Then you *did* see her?" Nancy asked eagerly.

"Yes, I recognize the dark hair," Mel said.

"Did she come into the diner?" Nancy asked.

Mel shook his head. "She was outside," he said, pointing toward one of the windows.

Looking through the window over her shoulder, Nancy could just make out the Orchard Road sign.

"She was looking around like she was expecting someone," Mel went on. "I thought for sure she'd come in here, but then I got busy with a customer. Next time I looked, she was gone. I guess whoever she was waiting for showed up."

Somebody did, Nancy thought. "How long were you busy with that customer?" she asked.

"Couldn't have been more than a minute. Maybe less."

"And you didn't see anyone else after that?" Nancy asked. "Or maybe a car?"

"Now that you mention it, I did see a car," Mel told her. "It was pulling away from the corner there, heading up toward the main road. That must have been her ride, huh?"

Nancy's excitement grew. "What about the car?" she asked, trying to keep her voice calm. "Did you notice the make, or the license plate, or anything?"

"Afraid not," Mel said. "It was too far away to tell what model it was or see the license plate."

Disappointed, Nancy said, "What about the color?"

"Kind of light," Mel told her. "Maybe white, maybe a light tan or something like that."

The color of Miss Grey's car, Nancy thought.

"What's going on, anyway?" Mel asked, handing the picture back. "Is this girl missing? Are you with the police?"

"Not exactly," Nancy said, not wanting to explain. She checked her watch. "Wow, I've got to go. Thanks for all your help." Nancy gulped down half the cup of tea.

"You bet," Mel said. "Good luck."

Nancy thanked him again, paid for her tea, and left.

Back in her car Nancy sat for a moment before starting back, thinking about what she'd learned.

Veronica had definitely come here Sunday night. And she'd probably been taken away in a pale-colored car. What had made her come? It had to be something important, or Veronica wouldn't have left the campus so late. What was the lure?

Margot could have called Veronica and pretended to set up something about the newspaper story, Nancy thought, to get Veronica out here. Maybe Margot promised an exclusive interview with the people involved.

Nancy wasn't sure what Miss Grey might have said to get Veronica off campus, but it could have been just about anything. Most students wouldn't question a call from the director of their school.

Neither Margot nor Miss Grey could be working alone, though, Nancy thought. They'd need accomplices—someone to keep Veronica hidden and to make the kidnapping calls. Of course, it might not be either of them. It could be somebody else completely, someone Nancy didn't know about.

Nancy started the car and pulled away toward the main road. The first thing she had to do was tell Phil Kroger and Nicholas Armand what she'd discovered. No wonder Kroger had said the place was a dead end, she thought. He'd come here during the day. It was a good thing she'd decided to check it out at a later time. Of course, there were still plenty of unanswered questions, but at least she'd found another lead.

Feeling hopeful, Nancy turned onto the two-lane road and headed back toward Brookfield Academy. She'd gone about a mile when a pair of headlights on high beam appeared in her rearview mirror, almost blinding her.

The car was coming up fast. Nancy slowed down and pulled slightly to the right, so it could pass her. Having someone tailgate her wouldn't help her think at all.

The car behind pulled out to Nancy's left, and Nancy slowed down a little more. But instead of passing her, the car angled

back to the right.

Nancy heard the grating of metal as her left rear fender was hit. She took her foot off the gas pedal and leaned on the horn, turning her car even more to the right. She couldn't go much farther, though. The shoulder was narrow, and beyond it there was a steep drop into a rocky gully.

The car behind her didn't drop back or come forward. It stayed where it was. Then it swerved to the right and thudded into Nancy's car, a little harder this time.

The two right-side tires of Nancy's car spun as they hit the gravelly shoulder. Nancy jerked the steering wheel to the left to keep from going off the road and into the gully. Metal grated again as the two cars scraped against each other.

Her heart pounding, Nancy leaned on the horn and didn't let up. The other car dropped back. Nancy tried to get a look at it to see who was driving, but the headlights were still blinding her.

Suddenly the other car was at her side again. It hit Nancy's car and pushed it toward the steep drop. Nancy was terrified. By now she knew this was no accident—it was deliberate. Someone was trying to force her off the road!

Close Calls

Grasping the steering wheel tightly, Nancy took a deep breath and aimed her car back toward the road. At the same time she pushed down on the gas pedal.

For a few frightening seconds her tires spun again on the loose gravel shoulder. Nancy gritted her teeth. Finally the front tires got a grip on the blacktop, and she was moving fast.

But the car behind her had no problem keeping up. Within a few seconds it was back in place, its front end inches from her rear fender. Nancy braced herself, expecting to be bumped again.

But the bump didn't come. Up ahead, Nancy could see a car approaching from the other direction, its headlights getting brighter the closer it came.

The car next to her couldn't stay where it was, Nancy thought, not if its driver wanted to come out of this alive. If she sped up, it would have to drop back. But then it would still be behind her. It could start playing its deadly game again the minute the other car had passed by.

Instead of speeding up, Nancy tapped her brake, slowing her car down. Her pursuer stayed with her, and she felt another light bump on her fender.

The approaching car was even closer now, and Nancy could hear its horn blaring. Holding her breath, she braked again. This time the car behind her had no choice. With a screech of its tires, it pulled up beside her and started to pass.

Nancy risked a split-second glance to her left, hoping to get a look at whoever was trying to run her off the road. The car was light-colored, she could tell that much. A figure was hunched

over the steering wheel, wearing what looked like a stocking cap. But it was much too dangerous for Nancy to keep looking. The three cars were lined up side by side. Nancy jerked her eyes back to the road. Her hands were slick with sweat, and her heart thudded in her ears like a drum. At any moment she expected to hear the sickening sounds of crunching metal and breaking glass.

But, to Nancy's relief, the sounds didn't come. She was just far enough to the right for her pursuer to thread his way between her car and the oncoming one. Horns blared loudly and headlights glared in Nancy's eyes, but there was no crash.

The moment it was over, Nancy sped up again, hoping to follow her pursuer. If she could get close enough, she might be able to see who was driving, or at least read the license plate.

It was no use, though. The other car was far ahead now, its taillights growing smaller and smaller until they looked like fireflies in the distance. Nancy was already driving the speed limit. She'd have to do at least ninety if she wanted to catch up.

She was disappointed but relieved she'd come out of the ordeal safely. And she'd learned a couple of things, too. One—somebody was trying to scare her off the investigation. And two—that somebody was driving a pale-colored car.

• • •

When Nancy woke the next morning, she went straight to the administration building to tell Phil Kroger what had happened. She'd called him the night before, to find out if the kidnapper had phoned again, but there'd been no answer. She wanted to talk to him about that, too. With Veronica's life at stake, he had to have an awfully good reason for leaving.

"It's simple, Miss Drew," Kroger said when she walked into his office and asked him. "I didn't leave."

"But I called," Nancy protested. "I let the phone ring at least fifteen times."

"You must have dialed wrong, then," he told her. "I was here the whole night. The phone didn't ring once, let alone fifteen

times.”

Nancy studied him. He certainly looked as if he'd been up all night. His shirt was rumpled and he needed a shave. She didn't think she'd dialed the wrong number, but she guessed it was possible.

“Anyway, it doesn't matter,” Kroger said, pulling an electric shaver from his desk drawer. “Nobody called. There was no action here last night, so you didn't miss a thing.” He walked over to a framed print on the wall and, using the glass as a mirror, he began to shave.

“Maybe there wasn't any action here,” Nancy said over the shaver's whine, “but there was plenty of it where I was.”

“Oh?” Phil Kroger smiled a little. “Was there a dorm party or something?”

Ignoring his attempt to tease her, Nancy told him everything that had happened the night before—what she'd learned from Mel at the diner and about nearly being driven off the road. Then she told him of her suspicions about Miss Grey and Margot.

At last Phil Kroger seemed interested in what she had to say. Finished shaving, he snapped off the shaver and turned to her. “Miss Grey,” he said thoughtfully, “looks as if she's got a strong motive.”

“So does Margot,” Nancy said. “And she left the office right before the kidnapper called, remember? I think the caller was a man, but if Margot's involved, she's probably working with somebody.”

Kroger nodded.

“I think she knows I'm investigating Veronica's disappearance, though,” Nancy went on. “She works right here in the office, and I'm spending a lot of time here—for a student, anyway.”

“Does Margot have a car?” Kroger asked.

“I don't know. She's made several comments about not having much money, so I'd be surprised if she did. But I'll find out. She

wouldn't have to own one, though," Nancy added. "Whoever she's working with could have been driving."

Kroger went back to his desk and put the shaver away. "She has a good motive, too," he said. "She gets Veronica out of the way so she can take over a good story. And she makes a nice bundle of money, too."

"We'll have to find out where Margot and Miss Grey were last night," Nancy said. "And keep an eye on both of them. Since I have access to the dorm, it'll be easier for me to watch Margot."

"Right," Kroger agreed. "I'll take Miss Grey."

"Fine. There's something else we should talk about," Nancy added. She didn't know why he'd finally decided to cooperate, but it sure made life easier.

"Yeah, yeah," Kroger said. "We don't tell Mr. Armand about this."

"You're right," Nancy said. "We don't have any proof yet. If Mr. Armand knows who our suspects are, he might accidentally say something that'd tip the kidnappers off."

"Right," Kroger said. "He's already in the dark—it won't hurt to let him stay there for a while."

Just then there was a sharp rap at the door. Before anyone could answer, the door opened and Nicholas Armand walked in.

Phil Kroger quickly smoothed his wrinkled shirt and pulled on his sports coat.

Nancy noticed that Armand didn't look much like a famous director today. He was wearing jeans, a loose sports shirt with the sleeves rolled up, running shoes, and sunglasses. On his head was a rumpled tan fishing cap.

"My disguise," he said, taking off the hat and sunglasses. Nancy saw that Armand had dark circles under his eyes. "Ordinarily, I love to talk to fans," Armand continued, "but I don't want the media to get hold of what's happening. They'd turn it into a circus. Besides, I wouldn't be very good at making conversation today, I'm afraid."

"That's understandable," Nancy said sympathetically. "You're very worried."

Armand nodded. "Veronica must be terrified," he said, dropping wearily into a chair. "But I keep telling myself that she's got a good head on her shoulders. She won't fall apart, I'm sure of it." He smiled slightly. "She's probably furious, too."

"Furious?" Nancy asked.

"She visited me in New York a few weeks ago, just before I left for England," Armand said. "And she was all excited about a story she was planning to write for the school newspaper." He looked at his security man. "You were there, Phil. You remember."

Kroger cleared his throat. "I'm afraid I don't," he said. "I must not have been paying attention."

"Paying attention is how you earn your salary," Armand told him sharply. "I hope your attention's improved since you've arrived here."

Kroger didn't answer, but Nancy could see that he was gritting his teeth. She couldn't blame him for being angry. One minute Nicholas Armand seemed kind and thoughtful. The next minute he'd turned cold and critical. She reminded herself that he was under a tremendous amount of stress.

"Anyway," Armand went on, "being kidnapped is interfering with her big story. I'll bet she's fighting mad."

"That's good," Nancy said. "If she stays angry, maybe she won't be so scared."

Armand smiled at her. "A very good observation, Miss Drew. Let's just hope she doesn't have to stay mad or scared for much longer." He turned back to Kroger. "Sorry if I snapped at you before," he said. "You understand, I'm sure."

"Sure," Kroger said quickly. But Nancy could see that he was still angry.

"All right," Armand said with a worried sigh. "I gather there's no news or you would have said something. I guess it's back to the waiting game."

Much as Nancy wanted to be there when a call came, she had some investigating to do. She needed to check Margot's alibi for last night and to find out if she had a car. If Margot was involved

in the kidnapping, she had to have someone helping her. A boyfriend maybe, or a brother or sister.

"I think I'll go out for a while," Nancy said. "There are plenty of students I haven't talked to yet. One of them might have seen or heard something. You never know."

Kroger glanced at his watch and cleared his throat. "I'll walk out with you," he said to Nancy. "I'd like to have a word with Miss Grey."

Just as the two of them reached the door, it opened and Miss Grey walked in.

"Margot just buzzed me," the director told them, her voice shaking. "She said there's somebody on the line with, as she put it, 'a really weird-sounding voice.' I don't know if it's the kidnapper, but . . ."

Nicholas Armand jumped to his feet. Nancy and Kroger were already moving toward the door. Quickly they gathered around Miss Grey's desk.

The director took a deep breath, then picked up the phone. "Go ahead, Margot," she said. "Put the call through." She pushed the button for the speaker.

There were a few seconds of silence as the four of them waited tensely. At last a voice spoke.

"Hello?" it said.

This voice wasn't weird-sounding at all. It was the soft, breathless voice of Veronica Armand.

An Unpleasant Surprise

Nicholas Armand bent toward the phone. "Veronica?" he said. "Honey, are you all right?"

"Dad?" Veronica's voice was suddenly loud and excited. "Daddy, is that you?"

There was a pause, and Nancy could hear a muffled whisper. Phil Kroger took out a small tape recorder and set it next to the phone. Then Veronica spoke again.

"I'm supposed to tell you I'm okay," she said. "I mean, I *am* okay. They haven't hurt me or anything like that." She took a shaky breath. "Of course, if I could make a wish, I'd rather be back in the dorm. I have a penny, but . . ."

There was a shuffling sound. Then the muffled voice they'd heard the first time the kidnapper called came over the line. "Okay, you heard her," he said. "She's okay. If you want her to stay that way, don't do anything stupid like calling the police. I'll be in touch. Tonight."

"Wait!" Nicholas Armand cried. "Let me—"

But the caller had hung up.

Armand pounded the desk with his fist. "Why didn't they ask for the money now?" he said, beginning to pace around the room. "What's the point of waiting?"

"To keep you on edge," Nancy told him. "The more worried and nervous you are, the more likely you'll be to give them what they want."

"I'd give them what they want right now if they'd just tell me what it is," Armand said, still pacing. Suddenly he stopped and looked at Phil Kroger. "Did you get it all on tape?"

"I'm rewinding it now," Kroger said. He punched a button on the recorder, and they listened to the call again.

"She sounds all right," Miss Grey said. "Frightened, of course, but I don't think she's been harmed, Mr. Armand."

"So far." Armand looked frustrated. "I was hoping there might be some noise, something in the background that would help us figure out where she is. But there's nothing."

"They must have thought of that," Kroger said, taking the tape out of the recorder.

"I have a recorder in my room at the dorm," Nancy told him. "Could I borrow that and make a copy? I'd like to hear it again."

"I don't see why," Kroger said. "Mr. Armand's right—it doesn't hold any clues."

Phil Kroger was being uncooperative again, Nancy thought, annoyed. He'd seemed almost human a little earlier. "I'd still like to listen to it some more," she said, holding out her hand for the tape.

"Give it to her, Phil," Armand said. "It won't hurt to let her try."

Reluctantly Kroger handed the tape to Nancy.

"Thanks," Nancy said. "I'll get it back to you later today." Kroger might think it didn't hold a clue, but she wasn't so sure. She had a feeling that, if she listened to the tape over and over again, she might hear something she'd missed the first time. Besides, Veronica's remark about the penny and the wish had Nancy wondering. She didn't know what it meant, but she wanted to hear it again.

Miss Grey cleared her throat. "I realize this is a terribly difficult time for you," she said to Mr. Armand. "But my work is piling up." She gestured toward her desk, which was piled high with folders. "I only hope I can concentrate on it."

"At least you've got something to concentrate *on*," Armand said. "All I've got at the inn are magazines, and I don't remember a single thing I've read." He managed to smile. "Don't worry, Miss Grey. We won't be hanging around your office all

day. I'm going back to the inn until about five. The kidnapper said he'd call again tonight, and I want to be here if he does."

"Of course," she said. Then she gave him a nervous glance. "I'm afraid I have an important conference scheduled at five-thirty. I'll try to get out of it, but—"

Armand interrupted her with a wave of his hand. "No need," he said. "I appreciate your wanting to be here, but it's really not necessary."

Miss Grey sat down at her desk, a look of relief on her face. Nancy noticed that Phil Kroger was watching the school director closely. He was probably wondering the same thing Nancy was—whether there really was a conference.

Miss Grey reached for a folder, then stopped. "Before I forget," she said, opening one of the desk drawers, "I had duplicate keys made. One for this building, and one for this office." She took out four keys and handed two each to Nancy and Kroger.

Nicholas Armand started for the door, then stopped. Looking back at Nancy, he said, "I'm glad you didn't bring up the idea of going to the police this time, Miss Drew. After that call, it's completely out."

Nancy nodded in agreement as she watched him leave. With one of the suspects in the room, going to the police was the last thing she'd mention. She still thought the police should be brought in, however. She didn't want to take any action behind Mr. Armand's back, but at the same time she didn't want to put Veronica in more danger. She decided to give it one more day. Then she'd definitely contact the police on her own.

After Armand had gone, Miss Grey opened one of her folders, and Phil Kroger went into his adjoining office. Nancy said goodbye to the school director and left.

Margot was just sitting down at her desk in the outer office when Nancy walked in. Looking at some notes on a legal pad, Margot began to type on her computer keyboard. "Funny," she said to Nancy, "I didn't see you come in."

Funny, Nancy thought—Margot had forgotten to turn on her computer. She'd probably been listening at the door. "I got here before you did, I guess," Nancy said. "I needed to see Miss Grey about my transcript from my other school."

Margot kept typing, not even noticing her blank monitor.

Nancy needed to find out if Margot had a car, but it would be too obvious to come right out and ask. There was something else she could find out, though.

"I waved to you at the library last night," Nancy said, making up the incident to try to catch Margot lying. "I guess you didn't see me."

Margot didn't lift her eyes from the pad of paper. "You must have seen somebody else," she said. "I had this rotten headache, so I went to bed after dinner. My roommate's in the infirmary with the flu. I think I might be coming down with it, too. I slept straight through till morning."

It wasn't a very good alibi, Nancy thought, not with the roommate gone. Margot could have left at any time and no one would have missed her.

"Well, I hope you don't get sick," Nancy said. She moved a little closer to Margot's desk. "How's the story coming?"

Margot lifted her hands from the keyboard as if it had suddenly gotten hot. "What story?"

"The one about the land Brookfield might build on," Nancy reminded her. "You know—the plans to chop down the forest?" Nancy took two more steps toward the desk.

"That's Veronica's story," Margot said. She looked at her monitor and seemed relieved to find it blank. Quickly she flipped to an empty page on the legal pad.

But Margot was too late, Nancy thought. She'd already seen the words *forest* and *nature lovers' coalition* before Margot had flipped the pages.

"Well, I guess I misunderstood," Nancy said. "I thought Jane told me you'd be writing it—if Veronica couldn't," she added.

"Listen," Margot said nervously, "I've got a lot of stuff to do for Miss Grey. Plus I've got a class in half an hour."

“Sure,” Nancy said with a smile. “I’ll let you get to work. Don’t forget to turn on your monitor,” she added.

Margot just stared at her, openmouthed.

Now Nancy was sure that Margot had stolen Veronica’s story. That had to be what she’d been looking for in Veronica’s room and what she’d been hiding on the legal pad. Did Margot have Veronica kidnapped so she could write the story and save her scholarship?

• • •

Nancy ran into Claudia on her way back to the dorm. Claudia was headed to the dining hall for an early lunch, and since Nancy hadn’t eaten any breakfast except one of Hannah’s chocolate chip cookies, she decided to join her. As they put their lunches on a tray and headed for a table, Nancy asked Claudia if she knew if Margot had a car.

“A car?” Claudia frowned, then shook her head. “I really don’t know if Margot has one,” she said. “But I bet she doesn’t.”

“Why?” Nancy asked.

“Because if she did, she’d make sure everybody knew about it,” Claudia said with a little laugh. “She gripes about kids who have lots of things, and I know she’s jealous. If she had something like a car, she’d brag about it for sure.”

Claudia took a sip of her tomato soup. “This has something to do with Veronica, doesn’t it, Nancy?” she asked.

“I’m afraid so,” Nancy said.

“Do you really think Margot might be in on the kidnapping?” Claudia asked. “That’s awful! I mean, I don’t like her much, but it’s hard to believe she’d do something that crazy.”

Nancy swallowed a bite of her grilled cheese sandwich. “I honestly don’t know if she did, Claudia,” she said. “But I have to check every possibility.” She decided not to mention that Miss Grey was another possible suspect. She didn’t want to upset Claudia even more.

“I guess you do,” Claudia said, spooning up more soup. “Anyway, I don’t know for sure about the car.”

"That's all right," Nancy said. "Students with cars probably have to register them here, right? To get a sticker for the parking lots?"

"I think so," Claudia said.

"I'll check at the administration building," Nancy said.

Just then Jane Forsman came up to their table. "Hi, Claudia," the student editor said. She smiled at Nancy. "You haven't come back to the *Banner* office. What happened—too much work?"

"And not enough time," Nancy added.

Jane looked at Claudia. "Nancy told me Veronica went to New York. When's she coming back, anyway? If she doesn't hurry, I'll have to give a major story away to her big rival."

Claudia obviously couldn't think of a good answer.

"Isn't it supposed to be for just another day or two?" Nancy asked her.

"Right," Claudia said quickly.

Turning back to Jane, Nancy said, "But I thought you would have already given the story to Margot."

Jane shook her head. "Not yet, but I can't wait much longer," she said. "They'd both do a great job. The only problem with Margot is, she'll probably ask to borrow my car to drive out to the site."

There's my answer to that question, Nancy thought with satisfaction. If Margot's involved, someone else's car is being used. And if Jane hasn't given her the assignment, then it was likely that Margot had stolen Veronica's story.

"My car needs new brakes, though," Jane went on. "I guess Margot will just have to ask her uncle for a ride."

"Uncle?" Nancy asked.

"Oh, that's right," Claudia said. "I remember her telling me that she had an uncle who lives in River Heights."

"Margot hates it," Jane said. "Not her uncle—I mean his car. Truck, I should say. Every time he comes to see her, she complains about his pickup." She shrugged. "It's got wheels, though. That's what counts."

A pickup truck. Not the kind of vehicle she was looking for, Nancy thought. But maybe Margot's uncle had a car, too. She'd have to find out.

"That was really clever, Nancy," Claudia said after Jane had hurried off to class. "The way you kept her from asking me more about Veronica. Thanks—I couldn't think fast enough."

"You're welcome," Nancy said with a smile. "Listen, do you have a class now?"

"Not for twenty minutes," Claudia said. "Why?"

"I'd like you to come back to my room with me," Nancy told her. "There's something I want you to hear."

Nancy had decided to play Claudia the tape of Veronica's call. Phil Kroger had said there was no reason to play the tape again, but Nancy wouldn't be satisfied until she'd listened to it at least a few more times. There was something about the recording that bothered her, but she couldn't put her finger on it. She didn't know if it was something Veronica had said or the way she'd said it. Claudia might be able to help. She knew Veronica better than Nancy.

Together, the two girls walked across the sunlit campus to the dorm. They were heading for the elevator when the girl behind the desk called out, "Excuse me! Are you Nancy Drew? Room Three-ten?"

"That's right," Nancy said, turning around.

"Good. I've got something for you," the girl said. She took out a letter-sized envelope and put it on the desk.

Nancy thanked her and picked it up. On the outside of the envelope her name was printed in black felt-tip marker. Ripping open the envelope, she walked back to where Claudia was waiting by the elevator.

There was a folded note inside. As Nancy pulled it out, something fell to the floor.

"I'll get it," Claudia said. She bent down, reached out for the object, and gasped.

"It's . . . it's Veronica's!" she cried, holding out a necklace made of delicate gold links.

“Are you sure?” Nancy asked.

“I’d know it anywhere!” Claudia exclaimed. “She never takes it off.”

Slowly Nancy unfolded the note. Written with the same black marker was a message. “Back off, Nancy Drew, or Veronica Armand won’t ever wear her necklace again. And you won’t live to give it to her. You were lucky last night. You won’t be so lucky next time.”

Penny Wishes

“What is it?” Claudia asked fearfully. “What does it say?”

Nancy stuffed the note back into the envelope. She didn’t want to scare Claudia even more. “It’s a warning,” she said.

Claudia gasped again. “A warning? About what?”

“About me trying to find Veronica.”

“You mean it’s from the kidnappers?” Claudia asked. “But how would they even know you’re working on the case?”

A good question, Nancy thought, leaning against the wall next to the elevator. Besides Claudia, only a handful of people knew she was investigating! Miss Grey, Nicholas Armand, Phil Kroger, and probably Margot Simmons.

“Claudia,” Nancy said, “are you sure you haven’t told anyone about the kidnapping? Or about me?”

“Positive,” Claudia said firmly. “You said it might be dangerous for Veronica, right? I’ve kept my mouth shut, honest.”

“I believe you,” Nancy said.

Claudia started to punch the elevator button and noticed the time on her watch. “Oh, no,” she said. “I’ve only got a few minutes before chemistry. I could cut it, but my lab partner and I have to do this experiment in front of the whole class. She’ll kill me if I don’t show up. So will the teacher.” She bit her lip and frowned. “But you wanted me to hear something.”

“Go ahead,” Nancy told her. “I can check out a couple of things first. I’ll catch you later.”

“Okay.” Claudia started to leave, then turned back and held out the delicate gold necklace to Nancy. “You take this, okay? I just know you’re going to find Veronica. And when you do, you can give this to her.”

With a smile Nancy took the necklace and put it in the pocket of her jeans. She'd do her best to live up to Claudia's trust. Nancy knew she'd have to be extra careful from now on, though. The car trying to force her off the road and the threatening note proved that the kidnappers would do just about anything to stop her. But she had no intention of backing off.

After Claudia left, Nancy went over to the girl at the desk. "Excuse me," she said, holding out the envelope. "Were you on duty when this note was delivered?"

The girl peered over the top of her history book at the envelope and nodded.

"Who delivered it?" Nancy asked.

"A guy," the girl said. "But I don't know who he was."

"Was he young, old, in between?" Nancy asked. "What did he look like?"

The girl thought for a moment, twisting a strand of black hair around her finger. "He was sort of in between," she said. "Sort of like my father, and he's forty-seven. This guy's hair was dark, like mine, but it was getting thin on top. Let's see," she went on. "He had on a polo shirt and he was big."

"Tall?"

"Yes, but not skinny," the girl said. "Big like a football player." She thought for a few more seconds, then shook her head. "I can't remember anything else. Sorry."

"That's okay," Nancy said gratefully. "You've been a big help." Now she had a description of someone involved in Veronica's kidnapping. What she didn't know was whether he was the kidnapper or an accomplice to Margot, Miss Grey, or someone else.

"I guess he's not a secret admirer, huh?" the girl said with a grin.

Nancy smiled. "Definitely not," she replied.

After leaving the desk, Nancy went quickly up to her room. She pulled out the phone book that each dorm room was supplied with and looked up the name Simmons. It was possible, of course, that Margot's uncle had a different last name

than she did. If that was the case, she'd have to check Margot's personal file for the names and phone numbers of people the school should notify in case of emergency. With Margot's uncle living close by in River Heights, Nancy was sure he would be one of the people to contact.

There were fourteen listings under the name Simmons in the phone book. On the eighth try Nancy got lucky.

"Hello," she said after a woman answered the phone. "This is the Brookfield Academy calling."

"Yes?"

"We're doing a regular update on our records," Nancy said, "to make sure we've got all the correct information on our students. This number is listed as the one to call for Margot Simmons, in case of emergency."

"That's right," the woman said.

Nancy circled the number and address in the book. "And she listed her uncle as the person to contact," she went on. "A Mr. . . ."

"Ralph Simmons," the woman said. "Yes. He's not here right now, but he'll be back in half an hour. I clean the house for him. Do you want him to call back or—"

"Oh, no, you don't have to mention it to him," Nancy said smoothly. "As I said, we're just making sure we've got the right names and numbers."

"Well, you do."

Nancy thanked the woman and hung up. Then she made another call, this one to Bess. When George answered, Nancy laughed. "What did you do, move in?" she asked.

"No, I just came to pick Bess up," George said. "We made a deal—I'll go shopping with her now, and she'll play tennis with me afterward."

"Sounds fair," Nancy said. "Listen, I need a favor."

"Sure."

"I'm glad you're going out," Nancy said. "In about forty-five minutes, could you drive by this address—thirty-four Morgan Street—and see if there's a light-colored car parked there?"

There'll probably be a pickup truck, but I'm really interested in the car."

"No problem," George said. "Does this have something to do with the kidnapping?"

"It does," Nancy said. "And it could be important. So try not to be too conspicuous, all right? Just cruise by."

"Okay," George agreed. "We'll call you as soon as we get back."

While Nancy waited for George and Bess to check out Ralph Simmons's house, she recorded the kidnapper's call with her machine, then she leaned back on her bed and listened to it.

Phil Kroger was right about one thing, Nancy decided. There was absolutely no background noise. No car horns or other traffic sounds, no airplanes or machinery, nothing to help identify where Veronica was being held.

The kidnapper's voice was still too muffled for Nancy to tell much about it. She was almost certain it was a man's voice, but that didn't give her much to go on.

Nancy knew there were at least two kidnappers, though. Veronica had said, "*They* haven't hurt me." And what about Veronica's wish to be back in the dorm? She'd started talking more quickly when she said it, as if she were afraid of being stopped. Was she trying to get some kind of message across?

Nancy was rewinding the tape once again when her phone rang. It was Bess.

"We just got back from Morgan Street," Bess said breathlessly. "You were right about the truck. It's dark blue, and it was parked in the driveway. But we didn't see any light-colored car."

Nancy couldn't help feeling disappointed.

"There was a garage, though," Bess went on, "and the door was closed. There could have been a car in there. We didn't go look because you told George not to be conspicuous. But we will, if you want us to."

"No, don't," Nancy said. "You might be spotted. I'll try to get into town and look myself. Thanks, Bess."

“Wait. There’s one thing that’s kind of interesting,” Bess said. “The garage is one of those detached ones with an apartment on top and stairs that go up the side. Do you think Veronica Armand could be in there?”

“That’s possible,” Nancy said, feeling more hopeful. “I’ll definitely check it out.”

After she hung up, Nancy looked at her watch. The kidnapper had said he’d call back sometime during the night. Nicholas Armand was going to start waiting at five o’clock. Nancy wanted to be there, too, which meant there wasn’t enough time to drive to River Heights and back before five.

She hoped the woman who cleaned Ralph Simmons’s house didn’t tell him about the call from Brookfield. If he was the kidnapper, a call like that might make him suspicious. She’d just have to keep her fingers crossed that he didn’t find out about it.

After taking a quick shower, Nancy put on a fresh pair of jeans and a peach-colored cotton sweater. Then she walked over to the administration building to wait for the kidnapper’s call.

The call came at fifteen minutes before six. Nancy, Nicholas Armand, and Phil Kroger gathered around Miss Grey’s desk, poised tensely as the kidnapper spoke.

“All right. Listen carefully,” the muffled voice said. “You’ll need one million dollars in unmarked bills to get Veronica Armand back safely. You’ve got thirty-six hours.”

“That’s outrageous!” Nicholas Armand cried.

“Just do it,” the voice said.

Armand took a deep breath. “I’m not doing a thing until I hear my daughter’s voice again. And you’d better have her tell me today’s date, so I’ll know you didn’t just tape her earlier,” he added forcefully.

Good, Nancy thought. She would have demanded the same thing.

After a few seconds Veronica came on the line and gave the date. “I’m still okay,” she added. “I still have my penny, too, but I can’t make my wish.”

Veronica talked about making a wish the first time, too, Nancy thought. She wondered if it meant anything.

“That’s it,” the kidnapper said. “Thirty-six hours, remember. I’ll be in touch.”

When the caller hung up, Nicholas Armand strode quickly to the door. “I’ve got a lot of telephoning to do if I want to get that money in time,” he said. Jamming his fisherman’s cap on his head, he hurried out and slammed the door behind him.

Nancy turned to Phil Kroger, who was pulling on his sports coat. “What about Miss Grey?” she asked. “Did you find out where she was last night?”

“She said she had some business to take care of in River Heights and then she went home. She didn’t tell me what the business was, and I didn’t ask—didn’t want to make her suspicious. I’ll try to get more out of her now.”

“Where is she?” Nancy asked.

“She went into one of the other buildings on campus just before five-thirty,” he reported. “I went in and saw her at a meeting, just like she said. But she could have left early. I’m going to check now.”

“Okay, I’ll only keep you a minute,” Nancy said, walking out with him. Quickly she told him about the note she’d received and the call she’d made to Margot’s uncle’s house. “I’ll probably drive over to River Heights in a little while to see what I can find.”

“Right.” Kroger headed toward the back door of the building. “Sounds as if you might be onto something,” he called over his shoulder. “If it looks as though it could get dangerous, don’t try to do anything by yourself. Just back off and call for help.”

Now he’s being agreeable again, Nancy thought. She couldn’t figure Phil Kroger out at all.

Nancy walked down the hall and out the front door, planning to go to the dorm parking lot for her car. But as she passed by the reflecting pool, she spotted Claudia up ahead. Nancy decided to play the kidnapping tape for her before driving to

River Heights. She caught up with Claudia and they headed into the dorm together.

Up in Nancy's room Claudia sat down on her bed. Nancy perched on a corner of a desk and turned on the recorder. Tears filled Claudia's eyes as she listened to her roommate's voice. After Nancy played the tape the second time, she rewound it.

"There was another call just a few minutes ago," Nancy said. "And Veronica talked about making a wish again. Do you have any idea what she meant?"

Claudia reached into her bookbag for a tissue. "Sounds like she was talking about the wishing pond," she said, wiping her eyes. "That's what we call it, anyway. It's really just a small pond a little way off campus. But everybody throws pennies into it and makes wishes." She sniffed and wiped her eyes again. "Veronica goes there a lot to study when the weather's nice. She says it's really peaceful."

Nancy hopped off the desk. "Could you show me where it is?"

Claudia agreed, and the two of them set off toward the wishing pond. First they walked beyond the dorms to the edge of the campus grounds. Then Claudia led Nancy along a wooded path, over a small hill, and down to a small, clear pond.

Claudia reached into her blazer pocket, pulled out a penny, and tossed it into the pond. "That's for Veronica," she said softly.

Nancy patted Claudia on the shoulder. Looking around, she saw they were only a few minutes from campus, but it felt like miles. Across the pond, another hill rose steeply. It was thickly covered with trees and bramble bushes. On top of the hill was a cluster of buildings. They looked old and run down. The paint was peeling off them, and the back windows facing the pond were streaked with grime.

Nancy suddenly froze. Veronica had said she had a penny, but she couldn't make a wish. Why? Maybe, Nancy thought excitedly, because she couldn't toss her penny far enough. Maybe—just maybe—Veronica Armand was being held in one of those buildings!

A Daring Try

Nancy couldn't wait. There was a possibility that Veronica was a prisoner in one of the buildings, and she had to find out. The buildings weren't far away. If she didn't find anything, then she'd drive into River Heights and check Margot's uncle's garage.

"Listen, Claudia," Nancy said, trying to keep the excitement out of her voice. "I just remembered some errands I need to run. Let's get back to campus, okay?" Nancy didn't want Claudia to know what she was about to do. Claudia would definitely want to come, and if Veronica *was* in one of those buildings, getting her out could be very dangerous. Nancy couldn't involve Claudia in something like that.

Leaving Claudia at the dorm, Nancy hurried to the parking lot and jumped into her car. She'd decided to drive since the hill leading up to the buildings was so overgrown with trees and undergrowth. On foot, it would be like climbing in a jungle. Besides, if she found Veronica, she'd have to get her away fast. It was a lot easier to escape in a car than on foot.

Leaving the campus, Nancy turned in the direction of the wishing pond. Halfway along the two-lane street she'd driven the previous night, Nancy spotted an unmarked road that seemed to lead in the right direction. She turned into it and drove on as it dipped and curved for a few miles. Finally, when Nancy came to the bottom of a small hill, she saw the cluster of buildings up above.

Nancy drove slowly, passing a closed-down farm stand that had sold fresh fruits and vegetables. A little farther was another diner, which was open. The area was a lot like the one she'd

gone to the night before—just a few buildings and a house or two.

Nancy pulled into the diner's parking lot. From there she could see the front of the buildings. There were three of them. The first was only one story tall, and Nancy was sure no one could see the wishing pond from it. The next one had three stories. On the ground level was an old storefront with boarded-up windows. The second and third stories were blackened and water-stained. There must have been a fire here, Nancy thought.

The third building also had three stories. The bottom level was another storefront with boarded windows. The upper two floors didn't look lived in, but they weren't fire-damaged, either. The third building was the one, Nancy decided.

Slowly she drove around to the back of the diner, where there was more space for parking. Eager to get going, she parked her car and got out. Then she cut across an empty lot behind the diner, which was choked with tall weeds. Finally she reached the back of the three buildings.

Staying close to the walls, Nancy moved quickly and silently to the third building. She hadn't seen a light-colored car from the front, and there wasn't one in back, either.

Moving to the edge of the third building, Nancy peered around the corner. She saw a rickety fire escape leading from a top window partway down the building. It was so old and rusted that the bottom rungs had fallen off. Staying close to the building, Nancy edged her way along the side toward the front, almost tripping on an old wooden ladder that had been tossed in the weeds.

Once she reached the front of the building, Nancy checked the road and listened for sounds. She heard nothing. Immediately she trotted around the corner to the front door. It opened easily.

Nancy found herself in a large room filled with cobwebs and dust. The thick layer of grime on the floor showed many footprints. Somebody's been here, Nancy thought excitedly.

To one side of the room was a narrow stairway. Keeping her fingers crossed that the stairs wouldn't creak too loudly, Nancy started to climb.

To see the wishing pond, Nancy decided, someone would have to be on the third floor, so she bypassed the second. Just off the small landing at the top was a door.

Holding her breath, Nancy put her ear to the door and listened. All she could hear was the pounding of her heart. Cautiously she took hold of the doorknob and turned it slightly. It squeaked so loudly, she almost gasped. But there was no sound, no sudden movement from behind the door. Nancy took a deep breath and tried the handle again.

The door was locked, but it was an old-fashioned lock, the kind that might use a skeleton key. Nancy tried her car and room keys, but they didn't work, and she was afraid of breaking them. From the back pocket of her jeans, she pulled out her small pocketknife. This better work, she thought, carefully wedging the blade between the door and the jamb. Nancy gritted her teeth and worked the knife gently back and forth. Finally she felt the lock slide back. In a moment she had the door open.

Putting the knife back in her pocket, Nancy stepped quickly inside. She softly shut and locked the door behind her. Then she turned around.

She was in a large room with two dirty windows that faced the road. There were two faded, overstuffed chairs in the room, two sleeping bags rolled sloppily against a wall, and a rickety coffee table littered with take-out food cartons. Among the paper cups and bags were a mobile telephone and a yellow legal pad with a black felt-tip marker lying next to it.

When Nancy saw what was written on the yellow pad, she punched a fist into the air in excitement. She was definitely in the right place.

Written on one of the pages was the phone number of the Brookfield Academy administration building. Beside it was Miss Grey's extension. Another page had the exact words the

kidnapper had used when calling. There was another number, too: G-146. Nancy didn't know what the number was for, but she memorized it in case it might be important.

A sudden sound made Nancy freeze. Holding her breath, not moving a muscle, she listened. Again she heard something. Not footsteps, thank goodness. But what?

The sound came another time. Two sounds, really. A soft thump and a kind of muffled whine. When Nancy heard the noise a fourth time, she realized it was coming from behind another door at the back of the room.

This door was locked, too, but once again, Nancy was able to use her pocketknife to get it open. The door swung forward with a loud creak, and Nancy stepped inside the small, dingy room.

Against the back wall, underneath a dirty window, was a cot. A girl of about sixteen was lying on the cot, her mouth covered with a strip of tape. Her hands and feet were tied, and her dark eyes were wide and pleading. She must have been trying to get loose and call out, Nancy thought. Those were the sounds she'd heard. It was evening now, and the room was filled with shadows, but Nancy could make out the features and long dark hair of the girl. Nancy had found Veronica Armand!

In less than a minute Nancy had the ropes and tape off Veronica. "Are you all right?" she asked.

"I am now!" Veronica cried in relief. "I can't believe you found me." Sitting up, Veronica rubbed her wrists, stretched her legs, and looked gratefully at Nancy. "I don't know who you are, but thank you."

Nancy introduced herself and hurriedly explained how she'd gotten involved. "We've got to get out of here fast," she said.

"Right," Veronica said. "The kidnappers probably went out to get dinner. They always tie me up when they leave. And they're never gone very long."

"How many are there?" Nancy asked.

"Two," Veronica said as they left the small room. "They never let me see their faces. They always wear ski masks when they bring my food."

The two girls were hurrying toward the main door when Nancy stopped suddenly.

“What is it?” Veronica asked.

“Listen,” Nancy whispered.

As Veronica listened, her brown eyes widened in fear. “Footsteps! They’re coming back!”

Nancy put a finger to her lips and pulled Veronica back into the small room. She shut the door and wedged a chair underneath the knob. Then she ran to the back window and tried to lift it. She could see part of the wishing pond in the distance.

“I tried that, too,” Veronica said. “I couldn’t budge it.” She pointed to the other window, at the side of the building. “That one leads to the fire escape, and it’s a bit looser.”

“Come on,” Nancy urged, running to the other window. “If we both try, maybe we can push it up far enough to climb out.”

Together, both girls strained to get the window up. The wood was warped and covered with so many layers of paint that the window would move only an inch at a time.

“We’ve got to hurry,” Veronica gasped. “If they catch us, I don’t know what they’ll do.”

“Don’t panic,” Nancy said. “Come on, get ready. On the count of three.”

At the count both girls gritted their teeth and pulled as hard as they could. Creaking and shuddering, the window went up about half a foot. Just as they were about to pull again, they heard the apartment door swing open and bang against the wall.

Nancy put a finger to her lips again and silently crossed to the door. She could hear heavy footsteps and the rustling of paper. She thought she could smell french fries.

Then she heard a man’s voice say, “Where’s the tray?”

Another man said, “Forget the tray. Just take the food in.”

There was more paper rustling. Nancy had just started to rush back to the window when the telephone rang.

“Right on time,” the second man grumbled. “In the middle of dinner, as usual.”

Nancy heard him answer the phone. But she also heard footsteps approaching the door to Veronica's room. In a flash she was back at the window. In a hoarse whisper Nancy counted to three again, and she and Veronica heaved at the window with all their strength. This time it moved up almost a foot. But it clattered and squeaked so loudly that Nancy knew the kidnappers had heard it.

"Climb out," she whispered to Veronica. "Go on!" Nancy knew it was a big jump from the fire escape to the ground. She hoped Veronica didn't twist her ankle or worse, but anything was better than getting caught.

Without hesitating, Veronica scrambled out. Just then Nancy heard a voice shout, "Hey!" Then the door to the room rattled loudly. "What's going on in there? I think she's getting out."

Nancy had one foot over the window ledge when she heard the man on the phone say, "I don't know. We tied her up, just like you said."

The door bumped and rattled again. Nancy knew it was only a matter of seconds before the chair under the doorknob broke and the kidnappers burst in.

"Don't give me that!" the man on the phone shouted angrily. "If she gets away, you still owe us. We took all the risks. All you've done since you got here is sit around and give orders."

The pounding on the door got heavier and louder. The chair beneath the doorknob slipped a little. There was a sound of splintering wood, and the chair began to fall.

Nancy squeezed down farther and ducked through the window. She was almost out when the leg of her jeans caught on a nail.

At that moment the door to the room flew open!

Safe and Sound

With a huge effort Nancy pulled her leg through the window, ripping her jeans and scraping her skin. She tumbled out backward onto the metal fire escape and scrambled to her feet. By the time the kidnappers had reached the window, she was halfway down the shaky stairs.

On the ground below, Veronica was shoving the ladder Nancy had seen earlier up against the wall. She wouldn't be doing that if she'd been hurt jumping, Nancy thought. Nancy raced to the bottom stair of the fire escape, then whirled around and grabbed the ladder. As she made her way down, she could hear the kidnappers trying to pound the window up farther. They were too big to get through the opening.

"Forget it!" one of them shouted. "We can't get out. We're wasting time!"

Nancy jumped the last three steps of the ladder and landed on the ground beside Veronica. Grabbing hold of the girl's wrist, she gasped, "Come on. We have to hurry."

The two girls raced to the back of the building and into the empty lot Nancy had crossed earlier. Some of the weeds were as high as their heads, and Nancy was pretty sure they wouldn't be seen. She was glad it was dark, but she wished she were wearing clothes that weren't so visible. Her peach-colored top would be easy to spot.

They were halfway across the empty lot when Nancy suddenly stopped.

"Come on," Veronica urged. "We're not that far ahead."

"Wait," Nancy said. "Listen."

Crouched in the tall weeds, the two girls held their breath for a second. “Hear it?” Nancy whispered.

“A car starting,” Veronica whispered back. “You think they’re leaving?”

Nancy shook her head. “I think they figure we’ll run into the diner on the other side of this lot to get help. They want to get there before we do. I just hope they don’t drive around to the back of the diner,” she added. “That’s where my car is.”

Keeping low, the girls crept as quietly as possible to the other side of the lot. When they reached the edge, Nancy pulled out her car keys and her pocketknife. “My car’s the little blue one—it’s the only one like it parked in back. As soon as I give a signal, you run and get in it. Then drive it around to the other side of the diner.”

“What about you?” Veronica asked, taking the keys.

“I’m going to try something,” Nancy said, keeping hold of the knife. “But if it doesn’t work—if I don’t show up when you drive around—just keep going. And don’t go back to Brookfield. Drive straight to River Heights and go to the police.”

Leaving Veronica behind, Nancy ran to the front just in time to see a tan car pull into the diner’s front parking lot. The car stopped with a jerk, and two men jumped out and hurried toward the diner. Nancy waited until they’d pulled open the door, then stood up and raced to their car.

She knew she had only a few seconds. It wouldn’t take the two men long to see that she and Veronica weren’t inside. Maybe they’d wait around a minute or two, though, thinking the two girls might have hidden in the rest room. She hoped they would, but she couldn’t count on it.

When she reached the car, she knelt down and opened the knife. Then she shoved the blade deep into one of the back tires. She heard a hiss and knew the knife had done its work. She worked it back and forth a little, just to make sure. Then, still keeping low and using the other cars for cover, she ran quickly to the far side of the diner.

Veronica was waiting, a frantic, worried look on her face. When she saw Nancy, she threw open the driver's door and scooted across to the passenger seat. Nancy jumped in behind the wheel and pulled the door shut.

"Let's get out of here," she said breathlessly, stepping on the gas. The tires squealed loudly as they pulled out of the parking lot.

Veronica twisted around in her seat and looked back at the diner. "Two men—they're just coming out now!" she cried. "They're looking this way. Can you go faster? They're going to follow us."

"Let them," Nancy said, smiling in satisfaction. "They won't get very far. I just punctured one of their tires with my knife."

Veronica breathed a sigh of relief. "I don't know how to thank you," she said, leaning back in her seat. "I tried to tell myself everything would be okay, but I was so scared."

"You did great," Nancy told her. "Thanks for putting that ladder up. You made the jump without hurting yourself, but I might not have been so lucky." She shook her hair back and eased up on the gas pedal a little. "The best thing you did was give us that hint about the wishing pond. If it hadn't been for that, I might never have found you."

"I knew I was taking a chance." Veronica shivered a little. "I thought for sure those guys would pick up on it. I mean, they could see the pond from the window, just like I could. But I guess they didn't make the connection."

They were getting close to Brookfield Academy now, but Nancy told Veronica she'd drive on to the Willow Inn, where the girl's father was staying.

"Great!" Veronica said excitedly. "I can't wait to see him. And Claudia, too. I'll call her from the inn. I'm so glad she asked you to help out."

"I wasn't the only one helping," Nancy said. "Phil Kroger's here, too."

"Yes, I guess he would be," Veronica said. "He's supposed to be one of the best. That's why Dad keeps him on."

"I don't understand," Nancy said.

"Well, Phil and Dad don't get along very well," Veronica explained. "My father can be pretty hard to work for, I guess. I bet he made Miss Grey feel as if this whole thing was her fault, didn't he?"

"Actually, he didn't," Nancy said. "I think he was too worried to start blaming people." As they passed the entrance to Brookfield Academy, she added, "Tell me what happened, Veronica. How did the kidnappers get you away from the school?"

Just as Nancy suspected, Veronica had gotten an anonymous phone call on Sunday afternoon. The caller promised her an exclusive interview with the owner of the land that Brookfield wanted to buy. She knew she shouldn't have sneaked off campus, but she couldn't resist. She took the last bus and got off at Sagamore and Orchard.

"I waited around for ten minutes," Veronica went on, "but nobody showed up. It was really late, and I knew I was going to be in big trouble. I decided to go into the diner and call the school so somebody could come get me. I wasn't about to walk back in the dark. It was too scary." She laughed a little. "Then the *really* scary thing happened. Before I went to the diner, this car pulled up alongside me. A man jumped out. He had a ski mask on, so I couldn't see his face. He grabbed me and pulled me into the car." She shuddered. "It happened so fast, I didn't even have time to yell."

"While you were in that room, did you ever see or hear anything?" Nancy asked. "Anything that might be a clue as to who kidnapped you?"

Veronica shook her head. "Like I said, the guys always had masks on. And they didn't say much to me. But they were on the phone all the time," she added. "I'd try to listen, but I couldn't always hear them. It sounded as though they were reporting to somebody."

Nancy nodded. She was sure Veronica was right. The actual kidnappers were working for someone else. The question was,

who?

• • •

Nicholas Armand stood openmouthed when he saw Veronica in the doorway to his suite. He hugged his daughter tightly, held her away and looked at her, then hugged her again. Nancy could see the striking resemblance between father and daughter.

“Thank goodness you’re all right,” Mr. Armand said.

“I’m fine, Dad,” Veronica told him. “Thanks to Nancy.”

Letting go of Veronica, Armand shook Nancy’s hand until she thought it might drop off. “Wonderful work, Nancy!” he exclaimed. “I never expected a young detective from River Heights to be the one to get my daughter back.”

“I’m glad I was able to help,” Nancy told him.

“Wait until I tell Phil and Miss Grey,” Armand said. “Phil’s at the administration building right now, putting the money in Miss Grey’s safe. I was able to get it together much faster than I thought,” he added. “I’m going to give Phil a call.”

“And I’m going to take a shower,” Veronica announced. “Then I’m going to order something from room service. I’m dying for a thick, chocolate milk shake. How about you, Nancy?”

“Sounds great,” Nancy said with a grin.

As Veronica headed for the shower, Nicholas Armand reached for the phone. Nancy sat in one of the soft chairs and listened carefully.

“Yes, put me through to Miss Grey immediately,” Armand said. “Yes, I know there’s someone in her office,” he said impatiently. “I also know she’ll want to take this call.” He frowned. “What is your name, young lady? Margot Simmons?”

There was a pause and Armand went on. “Well, Miss Simmons, this is Nicholas Armand. Yes, that’s right. And I’ve got some very good news about my daughter, Veronica. If Miss Grey and the gentleman who’s with her don’t get this call, I assure you they’re going to be very upset.”

While he was waiting, Armand glanced at Nancy. “Veronica tells me I’m too bossy,” he said with a smile. “But it gets things

done, doesn't it?"

Before Nancy could think of an answer, Armand began talking again. "Miss Grey, good news!" he said into the telephone. "Veronica's free and she's all right. Now, calm down, please. It's over, there's no need to . . ." He paused. "I don't know the details yet," he said. "But we have Miss Drew to thank for it. Yes, that's right. Put Mr. Kroger on, please."

Armand cupped the receiver with his hand. "She sounded as if she was going to faint," he whispered to Nancy. Then, into the phone, he said, "Phil, did Miss Grey tell you? Yes, right. I haven't asked her anything yet. She just got back a few minutes ago." He shook his head. "Not tonight, Phil. Save your questions until morning. After what she's been through, Veronica deserves to relax. What?" he asked. "Just leave the money in the safe in Miss Grey's office. I'll deal with it tomorrow."

Leaving a million dollars overnight with one of the suspects was pretty risky, Nancy thought. On the other hand, if it disappeared, it wouldn't be hard to figure out who'd taken it. Maybe the kidnapper wouldn't chance it.

Armand hung up and sat down across from Nancy. "Phil said to congratulate you," he told her, his eyes sparkling. "But if I know him, he's furious that you're the one who cracked this case."

Nancy shook her head. "I'm afraid I haven't cracked it completely, Mr. Armand," she said seriously.

"What do you mean?" Armand stood up and walked over to Veronica, who had just come in, wrapped in her father's dark red bathrobe. Putting his arm around his daughter, he said to Nancy, "Veronica's back, safe and sound. What more could I ask?"

"You could ask who was responsible for the kidnapping," Nancy said, standing up, too. "And I don't just mean the men who took her. I mean who was behind it. Somebody was running the whole show, Mr. Armand, and I want to find that person."

"Do you have any idea who it was?" Veronica asked.

“Yes, but I need to prove it,” Nancy said. She paced around the room for a moment, thinking. Suddenly she stopped. “It could work,” she said excitedly. “Yes, I think I’ve got it!”

“Proof?” Armand asked.

“Not yet. But I’ve got a plan that just might get us that proof.” Nancy took a deep breath. “Veronica, would you mind getting kidnapped again?”

An Impressive Performance

The next morning Nancy left the Brookfield dormitory and walked along the path to the administration building. She'd spent most of the night working out her plan to trap the kidnapper. Now it was time to put the plan into action. She hoped it would work. Veronica was safe, which was the most important thing, but Nancy knew she wouldn't be satisfied until the case was completely solved.

When Nancy walked in, Margot Simmons was in the outer office. Smiling nervously, she ran her fingers through her curly hair and said, "Miss Grey told me you were coming. She said to send you in the minute you got here."

Nancy thanked her and tapped on the door of Miss Grey's office. The director was sitting at her desk, toying with a pencil. Phil Kroger was there, too. He'd been looking out the window at the reflecting pool, but he turned around when Nancy came in.

"Thank you for being here," Nancy said. "I know you've both got a lot to do, but I wanted to say goodbye."

"I should be thanking *you*," Miss Grey told her, standing up. "After all, you found Veronica. I'd be very interested to know how you did that," she added with a smile.

"So would I," Kroger said, nodding. "Nice work, Miss Drew."

Nancy didn't want to reveal too much to either Miss Grey or Mr. Kroger. "It was more luck than anything," she said. "I'm just glad Veronica's okay. Now we can put all of this behind us."

Miss Grey fingered her necklace and nodded. "I was hoping to talk to Veronica last night," she said. "But Mr. Armand insisted that she not be disturbed. I hope she's not ill."

“She’s probably just exhausted,” Nancy said. “She was fine when I left. What about you, Mr. Kroger?” she asked, turning to him. “Was she all right when you saw her?”

“I didn’t see her,” Kroger replied. “Mr. Armand wanted her to be left alone, like Miss Grey said. And there were some details he wanted me to handle.” He nodded toward the door of the adjoining office. “I spent the night here, booking his flight, talking with the production company in England, tying up loose ends.”

“Well,” Nancy said brightly, glancing at her watch, “speaking of loose ends, I guess the last one is saying goodbye.”

Nancy shook hands with Miss Grey, then with Phil Kroger. Just as she was turning to leave, there was a loud shout in the outer office.

“Sir, you can’t go in there!” Margot cried.

Then the voice of Nicholas Armand could be heard. “I don’t care if she’s meeting with the president of the United States!” he shouted. “This is urgent. It could be a matter of life or death!”

The door flew open and Armand rushed in. There was a look of panic in his brown eyes, and he was gasping for breath. “Veronica!” he shouted, glancing wildly around the room. “Veronica’s gone!”

Miss Grey gasped, and Phil Kroger frowned.

“What do you mean?” Nancy cried. “How could she be gone?”

Armand was pacing the room, a wild expression on his face. Margot watched from the doorway, her eyes wide. “I don’t know how it happened,” Armand said. “She was still sleeping when I woke up, and I wanted to get her something special. So I went to the flower shop in the lobby of the inn and bought a bunch of daisies—those are Veronica’s favorites. I was only away for ten or fifteen minutes. But when I got back, she was gone!”

“Maybe she just went down to eat breakfast,” Nancy suggested. “Did you look for a note?”

“No, no, you don’t understand!” Armand cried. “Just after I realized she was gone, the phone rang. It was the same voice as

before. The same horrible voice. He said they had Veronica again.” He stopped pacing and took a deep breath. “And,” he went on with a shudder, “he said if I didn’t turn over the money in one hour, they’d kill her.”

Everyone started talking at once, but Nicholas Armand didn’t seem to hear them. “I have to find her!” he cried. “I have to find Veronica before it’s too late!”

Without another word Armand brushed past Margot and rushed from the offices. Nancy ran after him, ignoring the shouted questions of Phil Kroger and Miss Grey.

Out in the hall Nancy caught up with Armand. “Hurry,” she said. “We’ve got to get out of here, fast.” Side by side, the two of them raced to the outside door.

Nancy’s car was in the parking lot, its engine running. Veronica was in the back. Armand slid in the passenger seat while Nancy jumped in behind the wheel.

“How did it go?” Veronica asked as Nancy pulled the car onto the main road.

“Your father gave a great performance,” Nancy told her, smiling into the rearview mirror. “He almost had me believing him.”

Armand laughed. “Too bad the cameras weren’t rolling.” Then his expression grew serious. “Now for the next act.”

“Did you call the police, Nancy?” Veronica asked.

“I was on the phone with them half the night,” Nancy said. “They’ll be plainclothes detectives, so we probably won’t spot them. But they’ll be there.” She checked the rearview mirror and was relieved to see that no one was following them. She made a turn, heading toward River Heights.

“I still don’t know how you figured all this out,” Veronica said as Nancy drove toward the outskirts of the town.

“Well, when I found you yesterday, I saw a pad of paper on the coffee table,” Nancy explained. “The two men had written down just about everything they were supposed to say over the phone. And there was a number on the pad, too: G-146. I didn’t

know what it was at first, but I finally realized it must be a locker number.”

“Where the ransom money was supposed to be placed?” Armand asked.

Nancy nodded, then looked in the mirror again. Still clear. “So I made some phone calls,” she went on, “to the train station, the airport, and the bus station. The bus station is the only one whose lockers have that kind of number.”

“And you think whoever plotted the kidnapping is going to show up there?” Veronica asked.

“I’m counting on it,” Nancy said. “If I’m right, whoever it is must be pretty panicky right now. Too panicky to think straight and realize that Mr. Armand never mentioned *where* the money was supposed to be delivered.”

“So whoever shows up is the guilty one,” Armand said thoughtfully. “But why wouldn’t this person just take off with the money?”

“Because the guilty person thinks the two accomplices are responsible for this second kidnapping,” Nancy replied. “Their boss figures that the two men would track him or her down to get hold of the million dollars.”

“Tell me, Miss Drew,” Nicholas Armand said. “Do you know who this boss is?”

“I’m pretty sure,” Nancy said. “But I don’t have enough proof. That’s why this plan is so important.”

“Then let’s get the proof,” Armand said grimly as they drove into the bus station.

When Nancy pulled up, she and Veronica got out. Nicholas Armand pushed himself over into the driver’s seat. “I know you’d like to watch the whole thing, Mr. Armand,” Nancy said, leaning in through the window. “But you’re just too well-known. If people start talking about Nicholas Armand being here, it’ll be a giveaway.”

“I understand,” Armand said. After wishing them luck, he drove off to park the car where it wouldn’t be noticed.

Running quickly in their sneakers, Nancy and Veronica hurried into the bus station. Nancy knew they didn't have much time. They had to locate the right locker, then find a good hiding place near it.

Nancy was glad the bus station was crowded. "It's better this way," she told Veronica as they threaded their way through people carrying suitcases and duffel bags. "There's less chance we'll be spotted."

As quickly as possible, the girls walked across the main room of the station. Two wide corridors led off from each side of it. Nancy could see the banks of metal lockers lining the walls.

Signs for the lockers were posted above the entrances to the corridors. The one on the left was for those labeled A through J. Almost running, Nancy and Veronica headed under the archway and down the wide corridor, searching for locker G-146.

"Here it is!" Veronica said excitedly, her hand on the metal door.

Nancy looked around. Directly across from the locker was a set of double doors. Each one had a small square window near the top. Nancy pushed open one of the doors and saw a short narrow hallway. It led to a third door marked Custodial Supplies.

"We're in luck," Nancy said. "We can wait behind these doors and look right out at the locker without being seen."

Veronica stepped in, and Nancy glanced back over her shoulder. Groups of travelers in the main room were checking bus schedules, lining up to buy tickets, or trying to get comfortable in the orange plastic chairs. But she didn't see the person she was looking for.

As Nancy joined her behind the double doors, Veronica said, "What now?"

"Now," Nancy said, "we wait."

Ten minutes went by.

"This is awful," Veronica whispered. "I'm so nervous I could scream. I wish something would hurry up and happen."

“I do, too,” Nancy whispered back. “Anything’s better than waiting.”

Five more minutes passed. It has to happen soon, Nancy thought. She and Veronica watched the hall in silence, waiting.

Nervously, Nancy glanced at her watch over and over. Twenty minutes had gone past. It had taken her half an hour to reach the bus station. Nicholas had said he’d been given one hour to deliver the money. That meant ten minutes were left. The real kidnapper, the person who’d planned to receive the money, was cutting it very close.

Was it possible she and Veronica and Mr. Armand had been followed here? Nancy thought back to the ride and shook her head. She’d watched the rear window all the way. Once they’d made the turnoff to the bus station, there had been no car in sight behind them.

Both Nancy and Veronica were standing on tiptoe so they could see through the high windows in the doors. Nancy was dying to touch her toes, just to stretch her legs, but it would take her away from the window too long.

Nancy took another split second to look at her watch. Just as she did, she heard Veronica gasp.

Being careful not to let much of her face show, Nancy looked out the window again.

“I don’t believe it,” Veronica whispered.

Walking slowly down the corridor toward locker G-146 was Miss Grey!

Desperate Moves

"I just don't believe it," Veronica whispered again. "Miss Grey *can't* be the one. But she has to be. Why else would she be here? What do we do now, Nancy?"

"Wait," Nancy whispered back. "It's too soon to do anything yet."

Looking out the window, holding her breath in anticipation, Nancy watched the Brookfield director. Miss Grey's hair was tangled, and the belt of her trench coat was hanging down, almost touching the floor. She'd obviously come in a hurry. Walking a little way past locker G-146, she suddenly stopped and looked up and down the corridor several times.

Nancy and Veronica ducked back so they wouldn't be seen. "She's making sure nobody's watching, isn't she?" Veronica asked. "That's why she hasn't gone right to the locker."

"I don't think so," Nancy said. "Let's watch some more."

As the girls peeked out again, Miss Grey spun around, then hurried back toward the waiting room.

"We have to go after her, don't we, Nancy?" Veronica asked anxiously. "Or are the police waiting?"

Nancy just shook her head and kept watching. In less than a minute Miss Grey was back in the corridor.

"What's she doing?" Veronica asked. "Why doesn't she just put the money in and—" She stopped and frowned. "Wait a minute. She's not even carrying a purse. She couldn't possibly have a million dollars in her pockets."

"That's right," Nancy agreed.

Just then Miss Grey turned her head and caught sight of the two girls behind the doors. Her eyes widened in surprise. Before

she could say anything, Nancy pushed open the door and leaned out.

"I know why you're here, Miss Grey," Nancy said.

"You do?" The Brookfield director stared at Nancy. "Then you must be here for the same reason." She smiled in admiration. "You planned this whole thing, didn't you?"

Nancy nodded and gestured for Miss Grey to come behind the doors with her and Veronica. "Hurry, please," Nancy urged. "We don't have much time."

Quickly Miss Grey joined the two girls.

"I have about a million questions," Veronica said.

"I know." Nancy looked out the window again. "And I think you're about to get your answers, Veronica. Take a look."

Standing on tiptoe next to Nancy, Veronica peered out the small window. Her eyes widened in shock at what she saw.

Coming down the corridor, carrying a large canvas duffel bag, was Phil Kroger.

"I knew it," Miss Grey whispered, looking out the other window. "After you and Mr. Armand left my office, Nancy, Mr. Kroger went right to the safe. He got the money and rushed out, saying he was going to drop the money off. For a moment I didn't think anything of it."

"But then you realized that the 'kidnapper' hadn't told Mr. Armand *where* the money was supposed to be delivered," Nancy said.

"That's right," Miss Grey agreed. "How could Mr. Kroger know where to take it unless he was part of the kidnapping scheme in the first place?"

"But how did you know where he was going?" Veronica asked.

"I followed him in my car," Miss Grey said. "I didn't even stop to think how dangerous it might be. I suppose I was too surprised and angry to think straight. Once he came into the bus station, though, I lost him in the crowd."

"He probably spent a few minutes checking the station out," Nancy said. "Maybe he thought he could find his accomplices."

"It's a good thing he didn't find *me*," Miss Grey said.

Nancy nodded, her eyes on Kroger. Nicholas Armand's top security man had just reached locker G-146. He walked a few feet past it, then stopped and looked up and down the corridor. Seemingly satisfied that no one was watching, he went back to the locker and drew a key out of his pocket.

Nancy waited until Phil Kroger had opened the locker and started to put the duffel bag in. Then she pushed the door open and stepped out.

The door whooshed shut behind her. Phil Kroger heard it and froze, the bag of money still in his hand. Then he whirled around.

Seeing Nancy, Kroger's blue eyes widened. Then he let out his breath in a rush. "Whew!" he said. "You should know better than to sneak up on people like that, Miss Drew. This is a very tense situation."

"You're right about that," Nancy agreed.

"We'd better get out of here," Kroger urged. "The kidnappers could show up any second."

"I doubt it," Nancy said.

"What do you mean?" he asked. "They said we had an hour to give them the money, and it's just about up. It could be dangerous if we're spotted."

Slowly Nancy shook her head. "It's a nice try, but it won't work, Mr. Kroger."

Kroger tried to laugh. "What are you talking about? What won't work?"

"What you're pretending."

"Pretending?" Kroger's hand tightened on the bag. "I'm not pretending anything, Miss Drew. I'm dropping the money off, like Mr. Armand told me to."

Nancy shook her head again. "Mr. Armand said the caller told him to drop the money off. He didn't say where. The only way you could have known was if you'd been in on the kidnapping from the beginning."

Kroger's eyes narrowed as he looked at Nancy. "Well, well," he said after a moment. "Pretty good work, Miss Junior Detective."

"It's a little late to be insulting me," Nancy told him. "Especially since you've just been trapped."

The door whooshed again, and Kroger looked over Nancy's shoulder at Veronica and Miss Grey.

"I wouldn't call it much of a trap," Kroger sneered. "Not if these are your troops."

Nancy ignored the comment. "Mr. Armand gave a great performance, didn't he?" she asked. "And you fell for it. What happened, Mr. Kroger? Weren't you able to contact *your* troops?"

He shook his head and heaved a defeated sigh. "They had been threatening to take the whole thing into their hands," he said, running a hand through his gray hair. "When Armand came in this morning and told us about the call, I figured that's what they'd done—gone to the inn and taken Veronica again."

"So you had to deliver the money because you thought they'd come after you for it," Nancy said. "And you brought it here—the drop-off you were going to use if everything had gone right in the first place."

Kroger nodded, frowning at her. "How did you know which locker it was?"

"I found it written on a piece of paper when I discovered where Veronica was hidden."

"How could you do it, Phil?" Veronica asked, stepping up beside Nancy. "*Why* did you do it? My father must pay you well. It couldn't be for the money."

"It wasn't," Kroger said. "Even though your father doesn't pay me half what I'm worth." He gritted his teeth, still frowning, and started to move around as if he were so angry he couldn't stand still. "Your father needed a lesson," he said to Veronica. "He's been treating me like a servant ever since I started working for him. Always telling me how to do my job, always

criticizing. It's too bad his adoring public doesn't know what he's really like."

"He's not like you say he is!" Veronica protested. "He can sound like a drill sergeant sometimes, and he's used to telling people what to do, but that's just his way. He never did anything to you that should make you actually kidnap me."

Kroger ignored her. "Six months ago I asked for a raise," he said, smiling coldly. "Not a big one. A fair one. He gave me half of what I asked for."

"Then why didn't you just quit?" Nancy asked. "Surely you could have gotten another job."

"No. First, I wanted to hurt him somehow," Kroger said. "And the best way to do that was through his daughter."

"I see," Nancy said. "You planned the kidnapping, and then you were going to be the one who got Veronica back safely. You figured Mr. Armand would be so grateful, he'd give you any salary you asked for."

"That's it," Kroger agreed. "And that's when I'd tell him I was quitting." He laughed harshly. "And I'd walk away with his money in my pocket."

"What a rotten thing to do!" Veronica cried.

"No wonder you were so unhappy that Nancy was on the case," Miss Grey said. "I couldn't help noticing how reluctant you were to work with her."

Kroger laughed again. "Did you also happen to notice that she suspected *you*?"

"Me?" Miss Grey was completely surprised. "But why?"

"Because of the money you owed the nursing home," Nancy said. "Also, you had a light-colored car, like the one that tried to run me off the road. I admit, I did suspect you, Miss Grey, but I was wrong. I suspected Margot Simmons, too. She's so jealous of Veronica, I thought she might have tried to get her out of the way because of a major newspaper story she wanted to write. She needs a big break to keep her scholarship."

Nancy turned back to Kroger. "But in the end I was almost positive it was you," she said. "And now I have the proof."

“You may have proof,” Kroger said, “but I have to disagree with you about one thing.”

“What’s that?”

“This isn’t the end, Miss Drew,” Kroger said. “Not yet.”

He glanced down at the heavy duffel bag he was holding. Then, in a flash, he swung it at Nancy’s head.

Nancy jumped away, but the bag caught her on the shoulder, spinning her almost completely around. She staggered, caught her balance, and turned back.

Phil Kroger had grabbed Veronica around the neck, the duffel bag still gripped in his hand. In his other hand was his silver gun.

“Don’t move,” he said, swinging the gun back and forth between Nancy and Miss Grey. “Don’t move an inch until I’m out of here. Or it really will be the end for Veronica Armand.”

A Million Thanks

Aiming the gun at Veronica's head, Kroger started to move away, the girl still in his grasp. Nearby a woman who had been putting a suitcase in another locker froze, her face white with fear. A man walking down the corridor stopped suddenly and gave a sharp cry.

"Keep your mouth shut!" Kroger shouted at the man.

A woman holding a little boy by the hand saw the gun and gasped. Kroger swung the gun in her direction.

"Just keep quiet," he said, glancing all around the corridor. "Everybody stay cool and no one will get hurt."

Up and down the hall people stopped in their tracks, afraid to move. Kroger took a few more steps, pulling a terrified Veronica with him.

"If you think you can just walk out of here," Nancy said, "you're making a big mistake."

"Wrong," Kroger said. Now he aimed the gun at Nancy. "The big mistake is yours, Miss Drew, for thinking you could stop me." He pointed the gun at Miss Grey, who hadn't moved, then back at Nancy. "I've got the gun—did you forget?"

"Phil, please!" Veronica cried, her eyes wide and frightened. "Don't do this."

"Keep still and you won't get hurt," Kroger told her. He looked at Nancy and smirked. "Junior detectives don't carry guns, do they?" he asked her.

"I don't need one," Nancy told him.

Kroger laughed. "Really? What do you use? A slingshot?"

Nancy shook her head and pointed to the open locker. "The only weapon I need is right there," she said.

Kroger frowned at the locker. "I don't know what you're talking about," he said. "It's empty."

"No, it just seems empty," Nancy said. "Take a closer look."

Still holding Veronica, Kroger moved over to the locker and glanced inside. When he looked at Nancy again, his face was pale.

"A camera?"

"And a microphone," Nancy said. "The police are finally in on this, Mr. Kroger. They set this up during the night. It's all been recorded—every movement, every word."

For a second Kroger's shoulders sagged. Then he straightened up again, tightening his hold on Veronica. "Very clever, Miss Drew," he admitted. "But I've still got the gun."

"But the police have more." Nancy raised her arms and gestured toward both ends of the corridor. "And they'll use them if they have to."

Kroger went even paler as he looked around. At each end of the corridor was a group of plainclothes police officers. They all had guns, as Nancy had said, and every one was pointed at Phil Kroger.

But Kroger wasn't giving up. "They wouldn't dare shoot," he said, looking nervously back and forth from one end of the hall to the other. "There are too many people around. And I've got Veronica."

Kroger took another step, dragging Veronica with him. No one else moved. Kroger took another step, swiveling his head back and forth, desperately trying to keep an eye on both groups of police.

"You'll never get away," Nancy told him.

Kroger stopped moving. He was breathing hard, as if he'd been running. "Everybody out!" he shouted hoarsely. "Clear the corridor!"

The police didn't move, but the terrified passers-by immediately started to run for safety. The woman who'd put her suitcase in one of the lockers slammed the door shut as she fled.

The metal door clanged loudly. Kroger jumped, his gun arm swinging toward the sound.

Nancy saw her chance. She took three swift steps and kicked out with her right foot. Kroger's gun flew from his hand and skittered wildly across the tile floor.

Kroger had no choice now. He let go of Veronica, then dropped the bag. The police moved in quickly and surrounded him.

Nancy took a deep breath and let it out slowly. It was all over.

• • •

Later that day there was a small gathering in Miss Grey's office as Nancy said her goodbyes. Nicholas Armand had ordered a catered lunch that included a frosted cake with Nancy's and Veronica's names on it. He was there with Veronica, of course, and so was Claudia Dixon. Nancy had asked Bess and George to come, too, so Bess could meet her idol. Everyone was relaxed for the first time in days.

"It's so lucky for Veronica that you decided to visit me when you did," Claudia said to Nancy. "You have to promise to come back again, though. Just to have some fun, I mean," she added.

"I will," Nancy said. She watched curiously as Claudia took a paper cup and filled it with fruit salad. Then she began to do the same with some pasta salad. "What are you doing?" Nancy asked.

"I'm going to take these back to my room and eat them later," Claudia said. "We never get stuff like this in the cafeteria."

Nancy laughed and went to get herself some punch. Miss Grey walked up beside her.

"I want to thank you again, Nancy," the school director said. "You did a wonderful job on this case."

Nancy took a sip of punch and smiled. "I'm glad you understand why I suspected you," she said.

"Well, it *was* something of a shock," Miss Grey admitted with a laugh. "But I do understand. You were just doing your job. And there's some good news," she added. "I've been able to

arrange a loan to pay for my mother's care. It took a lot of phone calls and meetings with bankers. In fact," she added, "the other night, when you came to the administration building, I was going to yet another meeting."

And Phil Kroger just let me believe she didn't have an alibi, Nancy thought.

"The terms are reasonable," Miss Grey went on, "and I think I'm going to be all right financially."

"That's wonderful," Nancy said warmly.

"Tell me," Miss Grey said, "exactly how did you figure out that Phil Kroger was behind the kidnapping?"

"I'd like to know that, too," Veronica said, joining them. "You knew when we went to the bus station this morning, didn't you, Nancy?"

"I was almost positive," Nancy said. "But I needed solid proof. I had lots of reasons to suspect him, though. He didn't want to work with me, and that didn't make sense. Plus, he knew how much the kidnappers would ask for. He said, 'around a million dollars.' He made it sound like a guess, but when they actually asked for that much, I couldn't help remembering it."

Nancy drank some more punch. "Then he said he checked out Orchard and Sagamore, where you were captured, Veronica. Of course, he didn't really go there, but at the time I believed him. The suspicious thing was that he went during the day even though you were there at night, when there were different people around. Also, he didn't want to bring in the police, and he didn't demand that the kidnappers let you speak on the phone." She smiled. "That's pretty bad detective work for somebody who was supposed to be one of the best."

"Of course, being a bad detective didn't make him guilty," Nancy said. "Then I remembered that he heard about that newspaper story you wanted to do, Veronica. Your father said he had mentioned it in front of him, though Kroger denied it."

"So he knew if I got a phone call about a big story, I'd go meet the caller for sure," Veronica said.

“Right,” Nancy agreed. “And the thing that really made me sure was when you and I were escaping from that house,” Nancy told her. “The man on the phone said, ‘All you’ve done since you got here is sit around and give orders.’ So I knew whoever was behind the kidnapping had only recently arrived in the area.”

“Oh, I get it,” Veronica said. “Margot and Miss Grey were here all along. Phil was the one who flew in.”

Nancy nodded. “We were too busy getting away right then, but later it hit me.”

“And that’s when you came up with your plan to trap him,” Miss Grey said. “It certainly was clever.”

“I’m glad it worked,” Nancy said. “Phil Kroger told the police where to find those two other men. Can you believe it? They didn’t even bother to ditch that tan car they’ve been driving. Anyway, all three of them have been arrested.”

“How has your father reacted to all of this?” Miss Grey asked Veronica. “Phil Kroger had some very harsh things to say about him.”

“At first he was furious,” Veronica said. “Well, he still is, because of the kidnapping. But he said maybe he *is* a little bossy sometimes. He doesn’t mean to be, and he said he’d try to watch himself.”

Nancy glanced over at Nicholas Armand, who was chatting with George and Bess. “He’s sure on his best behavior now,” she said with a smile. “My friend Bess is totally charmed, I can tell.”

Veronica laughed. “He’s always nice to his fans,” she said. “It’s the people who work for him he has to think more about. But he’s really a good man,” she added. “He didn’t deserve to have all this happen to him.”

“Neither did you,” Nancy told her. “So what now? Is it going to be hard to get back to your schoolwork?”

“It won’t be so bad, not after being kidnapped, anyway. And I’m glad you mentioned that newspaper story,” she added. “I’ve got to get on it or Jane’s going to absolutely freak out.”

Just then the door opened and Margot Simmons came in. She looked around, nervously biting her lip. Then she took a deep

breath and walked up to Veronica.

"I have a confession to make," she said. "While you were gone, I started on that story about the land." She bit her lip again and looked at Nancy. "I was looking for Veronica's notes that time you found me in her room," she admitted. "And I've been using the computer out there to write it."

"I know," Nancy said softly.

"Anyway, I started to feel guilty," Margot said to Veronica. "Not just because you'd been kidnapped, but . . . well, I guess just because it was wrong."

"Let's call a truce, okay?" Veronica smiled at Margot. "And since you've already started, why don't we finish it together? It'll get done faster, and Jane'll be happy. We can have a double byline. With our two names on the story we'll both be famous."

Margot laughed in surprise. "Thanks," she said. "That would be great. Come on, I'll show you what I've got so far."

Veronica and Margot went into the outer office. Claudia, her blazer pockets bulging with napkin-wrapped cookies, joined them.

Nicholas Armand, with Bess and George at his side, came over to Nancy and Miss Grey.

"Well, Miss Grey," he said, "I guess it's back to business for both of us."

"Yes," Miss Grey agreed. "I almost forgot during the past few days that I've got a school to run."

As Armand and Miss Grey were chatting, Bess moved closer to Nancy. "Thanks for inviting me," she whispered, her blue eyes sparkling. "He's absolutely incredible. I can't believe I'm actually in the same room with Nicholas Armand."

"Bess is ready to float up to the ceiling," George said, chuckling.

"Ha," Bess said. "I noticed you asked for his autograph, too."

"Okay, so I did," George said, blushing slightly. "I have to admit, it's exciting to meet somebody so famous."

"And good-looking," Bess added.

Nancy laughed. Nicholas Armand heard her and leaned over toward them. "I have a proposal, Miss Drew," he said. "I'm looking for someone to replace Phil Kroger. And since you did such an excellent job on this case, I naturally thought of you."

"Thank you," Nancy said, smiling. "But I have to say no. I'm very happy in River Heights. You can do me a favor, though," she added.

"Name it," Armand said.

"You gave my friends your autograph." Nancy reached for a paper napkin. "Well, I'd love to have it, too."

"Delighted." His eyes twinkling, the famous actor picked up a second napkin. "But only if I can have yours."

"Sure," Nancy agreed with a laugh. "It's a deal."

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents are either the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events or locales or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

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